

THE CORNHILL MAGAZINE.

OCTOBER 1892.

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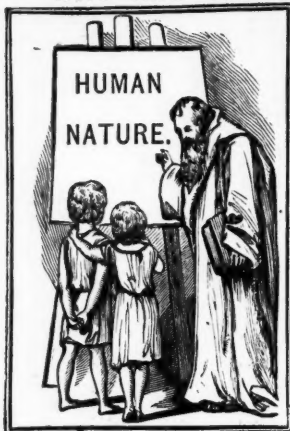
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OCTOBER 1892.

MRS. CURGENVEN OF CURGENVEN.

BY S. BARING-GOULD,

AUTHOR OF 'MEHALAH,' 'COURT ROYAL,' ETC.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE TRAIN.

THERESA started for the station an hour before the train was due. This was because the one omnibus which the town entertained had to ramble about the place picking up such persons as had notified their desire to be picked up and conveyed to meet the express up-train. Liskeard is not a town in which the pulse of life beats furiously, nor the whirr of commerce turns heads giddy. Except on market day there is very little business done in the shops, and except when the one omnibus jaunts about seeking travellers, very few persons are visible in the street.

But when that lumbering conveyance travels about the town, everyone rushes to the window or to the door to see who is going to leave Liskeard, and to conjecture the reason and the duration of absence. The draper is outside growling because such and such ladies are obviously going into Plymouth for a day's shopping, instead of accepting and being thankful for such bad matches in colour, such short lengths of material, such antiquated patterns, as he had in stock; and the grocer in his apron is on his doorstep, objurgating because certain customers are going into Plymouth to bring home real oysters and salmon, instead of resting content with his tinned preparations. The omnibus halts at the vicarage to receive a deputation from some missionary society, and to lay on the roof his portmanteau, one compartment

of which is stuffed with scalps, idols, and tomahawks, that have been exhibited the preceding evening at a great meeting in aid of foreign missions, in the schoolroom, and then bounces off to one of the inferior inns to pick up some professionals who have been giving a nigger concert in the townhall, and who have their costumes and musical instruments with them, all to be accommodated on the roof. Then the omnibus rolls away into a suburb to take up a lady who is going out of her mind, and is attended by a keeper. Next it rambles off in an opposite direction into another suburb to collect some children who are returning to school, and sob in the omnibus when they do not howl. Finally, it picks up commercial travellers here and there, with their familiar boxes of samples. At last, when the hour is nearly expended, the omnibus directs its way towards the station.

Theresa had been able out of the ten pounds given her by Mr. Physic to satisfy Miss Treise, to fee the servant, Bessie, and to extinguish the trifling accounts against her in one or two of the shops. There remained sufficient money to carry her to Scotland,—sufficient, not too much, though possibly there might be a few shillings over, when she reached Drumduskie, the residence of Mrs. Boxholder.

An inexplicable sense of regret came over Theresa as she left Liskeard. There was no reason why she should regard it as a home, and yet she felt that it was the only place in the world with which she was at all linked, the only place to which she was not absolutely indifferent. It was the town to which Curgenven looked as its headquarters. The only person who had belonged to her—Captain Lambert—was buried near there. Mr. Percival had been attentive and kind to her, he was the cousin of her dead husband, and he lived in Liskeard. She had passed through an epoch of her life there—great pain and anxiety of mind, and the place where one has suffered does somehow exercise a hold over the feelings. She was going to Scotland—entirely strange to her, and to persons whom she knew by name only. She was sorry not to have seen Mr. Percival and thanked him for what he had done for her, but he had not been to see her for the last two or three days, he had been busy at Curgenven. She resolved to write to him from Drumduskie, and express to him her sense of obligation.

She had taken her ticket for London, by Plymouth and Exeter, and had seen her box labelled. She was making her way into a second-class carriage of the express, avoiding equally that into

which the deputation thrust himself and lugged his portmanteau, and that which the nigger melodists invaded, and that into which the madwoman was with difficulty forced, when a hand was laid on her shoulder, and, turning, she saw Mr. Percival Curgenven.

‘By Moses!’ said he. ‘My dear patient—you off! and never a word of farewell. There she goes—in with you, quick, and by the powers I’ll come too—as far as Plymouth—I want a talk.’

The train was in motion, but he helped Theresa in, and then, in spite of the exclamations of the guard and station-master, he swung himself in and shut the door, then looked out, and waved his hat mockingly at the station-master and a porter who had endeavoured to pull him on to the platform by the tails of his coat.

Mr. Percival turned round, laughed heartily, and threw himself into a seat.

‘The fun of the thing is,’ said Mr. Percival, ‘I haven’t more than a fourpenny bit in my purse, and I haven’t a ticket. I say—Signora! no, I mustn’t call you that any more—patient! can you lend me the needful? Now is not this a rum situation? Here am I, squire of Curgenven, with an estate of four thousand a year, and haven’t more than fourpence in my purse. I had a few shillings, but I spent them over a fish cart in buying some soles I paid for. Now I have only fourpence. Can you help me?’

‘What do you want?’ asked Theresa.

‘I don’t know. Only a couple of shillings or so, to take me to Plymouth. When there I suppose I can get money. I’ll go to the bank, anyhow, and see what they will do for me. I’ve no account there. I never had a banking account in my life, for I never had any money to put into the bank. But they knew my dear old Lambert’s cheques to me—and they must take my word for it that I am squire now, worth in prospect four thousand per annum, with—unless they will help me—less than fourpence, for I shall owe you my fare.’

Mr. Curgenven looked round the compartment to observe whether it were occupied by any person he knew. Having satisfied himself that all were strangers, he said to Theresa, ‘I say—now where are you off to? Not that humbug Mrs. Boxholder, I trust. Not off to the Arctic regions?’

‘I am going to Drumduskie.’

‘Well, there—what an odd state of affairs it is for you and for me. Here am I a wealthy man who is penniless. Yesterday in

despair because I thought my hundred and fifty was at an end, now elate because of my four thousand coming in, but just at this present moment fallen into destitution and obliged to borrow a couple of shillings of you, because I can't finger what is to be mine, and have spent all that was mine. I went in for these soles to have a flare up with Justinian, thinking I was a millionaire.'

It was not possible for Theresa to refrain from laughing, notwithstanding her depressed mood.

'I say, patient,' pursued Mr. Percival, 'can you lend me five shillings? Then I shall have enough to take me back for certain, without running the risk of being snubbed at the bank. They know me at the Liskeard branch, they don't know my face at the Plymouth shop.'

'I cannot spare you much,' said Theresa, 'for really I am pinched. I do not know what my fare will be from town to Edinburgh, and thence on to Drumduskie.'

'Bother Drumduskie—you shan't go there.'

'I must indeed. I am engaged.'

'Cut the whole concern.'

'I cannot do that. I have no other means of livelihood: besides, I have had my journey money advanced.'

'Oh hang it! you've been treated abominably. I know all about it now. Signora, have you any cotton wool in your reticule? If so, do let me have it to plug up that old gentleman's ears. I don't want him to be made acquainted with our family affairs. Our family—that does seem odd. By the way, Signora, why did you not tell me your real name at Frisco?'

'I did not care that anyone should know it, but I will admit I was drawn to feel an interest in your poor wife by the name she bore.'

'Well, all I can say is, old Pamphlet and the missus have got rid of you uncommon cheap. Lord! to think of her—that pink of prudes, that paragon of propriety, discovering herself to be a very improper character indeed, no better than she should be—it is simply killing. But you don't know her, and have not suffered from her as I have. Bless you! she has never liked me. She sat on pins and needles whenever I came over to Curgenven, and could hardly contain herself from being rude. Dear old Lambert, she would have led him a life, but that happily he did not mind it, everything slipped off him that she heaped on; and he as cheerful and cool as possible. I say, amiable Jane would melt

into her boots if you blew upon her; she would, upon my soul. Her position, her morality, her nose-in-the-airdness are to her everything, and life would be insufferable to her without them. You keep dark, and she lives. Blaze out your tale, and it will eclipse her.'

'I am not going to blaze out a tale I have kept to myself these many years.'

'But really, it seems monstrous that you should come off no better. You have to think twice before you advance me five bob, lest you should not have enough money to carry you to Dustydiddles—no, Dustydrums it is.'

'You must remember the sacrifice she is making—she loses Curgenven.'

'That she loses anyhow. She should pay you something worth having for keeping a very unpleasant secret.'

'But suppose I absolutely refuse payment.'

'No—do you?'

'Absolutely. It was offered and I refused it.'

'Well—upon my word, you are hard used. But, Signora—no, hang it! I won't call you that, and something else I suppose I mustn't call you; I can say cousin, and dash me but I will.'

'Very well,' laughed Theresa; 'say cousin then, if that will please you.'

'Yes, I can say so in a railway carriage, where no one hears me, or is the wiser if he does; but I can't say it elsewhere, not in Liskeard for instance.'

'I am not in Liskeard and shall never be there again.' A little sigh escaped her.

'By Jove, that's hard. I say, cousin, I got hideously tired of being kicked about like a football, and was everlastingly thankful when dear old Lambert settled me at Liskeard—the missus wouldn't allow him to quarter me anywhere nearer—and relieved me of embarrassment for my future. Have you never felt sick of being kicked about?'

She did not answer. He looked her frankly in the face, and saw the pain and desolation written there.

'By Jove, Theresa, it shall not be. Hang me to the telegraph wire poles if it be so. I shall have four thousand a year—fancy, such a chap as I, who never in his life before had more than a hundred and fifty. I who was perfectly happy in a Pillbox must stretch myself out in a manorial mansion. By Moses! who'd

have thought it? It makes me astonished beyond measure at my good luck whenever I think of it—and that is all day long. So I am in a continual state of tearing amazement. But I say, Theresa—hang me if I won't call you that—I can easy cut you a slice out of my cake. How much will you have? Three hundred?'

'I'll have none, thank you, but the five shillings you will owe me.'

'Tickets, please,' said the collector, opening the door.

'Here—I haven't got one—she'll pay for me,' said Mr. Percival.

Theresa furnished the requisite sum.

'You're the gent as got in when the train was in motion at Liskeard?' asked the collector.

'Yes, that is he—and sir! you have made yourself liable to penalties,' said the guard.

'I say, old chap!' answered Mr. Percival, 'a word in your ear. I am now Squire Curgenven of Curgenven, and I shall travel up and down by your line, and not forget the conductor. You understand—only just now, I've but fourpence.'

'Right, sir!' Then—'Your good lady's dress is in the way of the door.'

Percival turned round and laughed. 'I say, Theresa, did you hear that? I wonder now how long we shall be at Plymouth before your train goes on. I've a great mind to go on with you as far as Exeter, and see you safe through those confounded tunnels in the red sandstone that are incessantly tumbling in.'

'You cannot indeed. Fourpence will not suffice; and I can lend no more money.'

'Well, then, I must be content to see you off. Hang me! I don't half like it. It was as pleasant to me to talk to you of old times and old scenes, and of my poor dear wife, as it was for Lambert to have me to talk to, a bit of relief from the old cat. What do you say to this? Will you occupy the Pillbox when I move to Curgenven?'

'Indeed I will not,' said Theresa. 'I have told you I must earn my livelihood.'

'You are an obstinate hussy.'

They had reached Plymouth. Some carriages had to be shunted. Theresa got out and so did Percival Curgenven. They walked the platform together. Then he dashed away to the

bookstall to buy some illustrated papers—swept together a *Punch*, an *Illustrated London News*, the *Field*, and the *Queen*—and found he had not the money to pay for them. He was forced to surrender all but *Punch*, which he brought to Theresa.

‘It is a hideous nuisance,’ said he, ‘I can’t give you more than this to amuse you on the way. Confound it—I wish I were going to Exeter with you. You’ll be lonely and dull.’

‘Now then!’ shouted the guard. ‘All for London take your places. Will you and your good lady step in, please?’

‘There he is again,’ said Percival, as he helped Theresa into her second class carriage. The guard turned the handle.

‘I’m sorry about the illustrated papers,’ said Percival, looking in through the window. ‘And mind, going through the tunnels, to keep your head in. I’ll not forget the five bob. I’ll write; Drumduskie—that’s it.’

The train was in movement, he ran beside the carriage, with his head in. ‘I say, let it be as he said; why not? My good lady—and Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.’

‘Now then!’ a shout from a porter. He was caught by the shoulder and pulled away, without receiving his answer.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT THE VAULT.

MR. PERCIVAL CURGENVEN arrived at Curgenven to take possession in the Curgenven carriage that he had ordered to be at the Pill-box for him.

He more than half expected that he would be welcomed by a peal of bells from the church tower, but was mistaken. With that tact which so characterises our English peasantry, the ringers felt that after the tragic death of the late squire, and with the retirement of the widow to the parsonage, a merry peal would be out of place. They knew that a peal would be honoured with a sovereign as fee, but they forbore the fee rather than make their bells jar with the feelings of their rector’s daughter and the orphaned child.

Mr. Percival was excited and joyous; it was a great day for him to come as representative of the Curgenven family into the ancestral home, a great thing to escape from penury into wealth,

and he thought that not all Curgenven only, but Liskeard as well, should be excited and rejoice with him.

But his elation subsided towards evening. He had rambled through the rooms, and had begun to feel that there was not in them the cosiness of the Pillbox, and that with many servants many sorrows began. But there were other causes to damp his excitement.

‘Please sir!’ said the footman, ‘there’s Mr. Huxtable would like to see your honour!’

‘Who’s Mr. Huxtable, John?’

‘I believe, sir—the farmer at Tregolwyn.’

‘I’ll come and see him. Show him into the study.’

Percival followed the footman, and was soon shaking hands with a heavy-browed, dark-haired, high-cheekboned man, broad in the shoulder and at the hip, who walked clumsily, and who with himself introduced into the library a strong odour of stableyard.

‘Beautiful day,’ said Mr. Huxtable.

‘It is. You want to see me?’

‘I’m ray-ther afraid if we have rain now, the sheep may get rot in their feet.’

‘There is a danger of that, I suppose.’

‘And how do you feel yourself now, squire?’

‘Oh! very well, very well indeed. You wanted to speak to me, I believe?’

After much beating about the bush, discussion of the weather—the price of fat stock, the condition of the turnips, the yield of wheat to the acre, Farmer Huxtable came to the point. It was this:

‘Well, sir, I thought I’d come airly and see your honour. The late squire never somehow could find time or money to put my outbuildings to rights, and there’s the roof of the linney fallen in, and the cowsheds be that deep in water, with there being no drain, and the airth outside bein’ higher than the floor, that it’s over cold for calves, and they dies; and the pigsties be against our house wall, and theer be great cracks as you might put your fist through, and the smitch (smell) comes in strong enough to turn the strongest stomick; and the chimley o’ the sittin’-room do smoke terrible; my missus hev gone to the ex-pense o’ papering the room, but lor bless your honour! the paper be all black wi’ smoke already. Her wants a proper register grate putting in, and the chimley raisin’; and her thinks if the floor were lowered the

room 'ud be a better height; and the rats run about the corn-chamber and eat a bushel a night; and if your honour would have it cemented all round, and fresh floored wi' sawn slates, it 'ud keep out the rats, and the doors and basements han't been painted these eighteen years and be all gone rotten as touchwood, and if your honour would come and see, they won't hold together another winter. And the roof o' the pound house be nigh blown away——'

'And what do you think, Mr. Huxtable, the repairs will cost?'

'Well, sir—I d'r say five hundred pounds 'ud do something towards it, but to make it as it should be—I d'r say it 'ud cost about double.'

A rap at the door, and John came in.

'Please sir, when you are disengaged, Mr. Obadiah Matters would like to see you, sir.'

'Well, Mr. Huxtable, I'll come over to Tregolwyn and see what must be done—but a thousand pounds is a great sum.'

'Well, sir, I could put up, may be, wi' five hundred this year, if your honour 'd spend another five hundred next year. I'll talk to the missus about it.'

Then he was shown out, and Mr. Obadiah Matters was shown in. This was a farmer on a large scale. Three decent farms had been amalgamated. When Captain Lambert came into the estate he found Tregowan, Llandhu, Leswith were farm houses, with ruinous outhouses and ruinous themselves. They and all the farm buildings needed rebuilding; the cost of each would be about fifteen hundred pounds. At the advice of Mr. Physic, Captain Curgenven threw the three together and built large and admirable barns, stables, farm house, at Tregowan, and pulled Llandhu and Leswith down, or turned what remained into fairly sound cottages. This extensive farm was taken by Mr. Obadiah Matters. His daughters read French novels and played operatic music.

'How do, sir, how do?' said Mr. Matters patronisingly. 'I've come to see you, at the outset, squire, that there may be no misunderstanding later. I suppose Physic has told you about me.'

'Oh yes,' said Percival Curgenven, 'he informed me that you pleaded inability to pay any rent last court, and that you were five years in arrear.'

'I did not mean that,' answered Mr. Matters hastily; 'I meant the conditions on which I stay on. I have insisted on a billiard

room being built for me and my friends, and a lawn tennis ground being dug out of the side of the hill for my daughters. It will be quite impossible for me to take on the lease again without these additions being made to the place. We can't pig it as did our ancestors.'

'I think if you can't pay the rent, I will not ask you to take on the farm for another lease.'

'You'll get no one else. Tregowan is too large for any West country farmer, and no man from the Eastern shires will come here—and if he does, he won't understand our land or our climate, and so will speedily come to grief. You must have me or no one, or break up the farm into three or four, and that will cost you a pretty penny in buildings—more than my billiard room and my daughters' tennis ground.'

'I'll talk it over with Mr. Physic, but I don't think, Mr. Matters, you'll find me very pressing to induce you to stay.'

'Oh, indeed—I'm sorry then for you.'

'Please sir,' said the footman coming in, 'there's Sir John Carmynow in the drawing-room, sir.'

'I'll be with him immediately. Good day, Mr. Matters.'

On entering the parlour, he was greeted with cordiality by the baronet.

'My dear fellow, I've come over to call the first thing. I've a lot to ask you, and I thought I'd do it at once. At once and done with it. Glad to welcome you into our neighbourhood, and may you be a support of the pack and a prop of the Conservative cause. In the first place, how about the hounds? Captain Curgenven helped liberally towards the maintenance of the hunt. You see, my dear friend, we are none of us about here rich men, and not one of us can keep a pack alive. They say it costs a master a thousand for every day he hunts in the week. Well, two for foxhounds and two for harriers, that makes four thousand—and it has to be raised among us. We'll put you down for the same as poor Captain Lambert Curgenven, I suppose.'

'Oh yes, certainly.'

'And then—how about politics. You'll subscribe to the registering agent—but that's not enough. There's, as you know, an election coming on, and we must all work. You must be chairman of the Conservative meetings here, of course, and you must do your utmost.'

'Upon my soul,' said Percival, 'I've no political principles at

all. I believe Great Britain is going to the dogs, and 'pon my life I don't know whether it would be best with the Radicals to get her torn to pieces and done for finally as dogs' meat, and have it over, or try to stave it off—with the Conservatives. It is a satisfaction to take the pound from him who doesn't know its value, and give it to him with ten, who does know its worth to a penny.'

'Please sir—the rector!' said John, showing in the Reverend Mr. Pamphlet.

'Why, Percival! how are you? How well you are looking!'

Presently, after some promiscuous conversation, Sir John Carmynow left. Then the rector, drawing close to Mr. Curgenven, said—'I've called in, just to make sure how we stand. I suppose you subscribe the same to the schools as we had from Lambert.'

'I suppose I must.'

'And to the clothing club?'

'Yes.'

'And to the coal club?'

'I suppose it is necessary.'

'Oh, absolutely. And to the shoe club?'

'How many more?'

'Oh—only the blanket club.'

'That is all, is it?'

'Well, there is the parochial lending library—but a guinea will suffice for that. I didn't quite gauge your views in matters theological, and so—I don't know *which* you would support, the mission woman or the Scripture reader.'

'Oh, by Jove—I've no theological views whatever.'

'So much the better, then you will pay for both.'

'Thank you—you are very kind,' said Percival ironically.

'Then,' continued the rector blandly, and passed his hands through his white whiskers, 'some of us have been thinking it would be so nice to fill the east window with stained glass as a memorial to poor Lambert. I am sure the poor will gladly contribute their pence and the farmers their sixpences, if you will head the list. I think it might be done for a hundred pounds. It is not a large window, you know. I will give five pounds, and poor dear Jane another five—out of her penury, casting in all that she can, and perhaps we could get together ten pounds in the parish. That will leave only eighty—and to you as squire that is nothing.'

'I think that must wait. I don't know on my soul what I

shall have. The income of this property is nominally four thousand, but I find there is a mortgage on it of two hundred, and the repairs and rebuildings will cost me at least a thousand a year. Put me down for nothing till I have had time to turn round and feel how I sit in this new seat. At the present moment, Mr. Pamphlet, it looks very much to me as though the outgoings were commensurate with the incomings. Sir John Carmynow has been here about the hunt.'

'But the Church and parish first,' said the rector in a tone of solemnity.

Before sunset the new squire sauntered to the churchyard; he heard the notes of the organ sounding through the open door. Some one was practising. He had his pipe in his mouth when he passed through the graveyard gate, and he did not remove it from his mouth, but walked slowly, meditating, towards the Curgenven vault, that stood outside the south aisle of the church, and was covered with a large slate slab. Beneath that slab lay the Captain.

Percival with his hands in his pocket and the pipe in his mouth stood looking at the slab, with the newly cut inscription on it recording the interment of the late squire.

A reaction from the excitement had set in, and some moisture formed in his eye. He drew one hand from his pocket and removed the pipe from between his lips. Then he seated himself over against the family burying place, on another stone, stretched his legs before him and remained with his chin on his breast, the pipe on his knee feebly sending forth a slight fume, and considered—he almost thought aloud. His lips moved forming the words that rose up in his mind. 'Dear old boy! I'm profoundly sorry for you—old chap. It takes all the pleasure out of my advancement to think that I step to it over your jolly old body. 'Pon my soul, Lambert, I'd a hundred thousand times rather be back in the Pillbox, and you in Curgenven. Whom the deuce shall I have to talk to and play billiards with, and smoke a pipe, and drink a glass of whisky toddy with now, old boy? Peace be to your ashes, my dear Lambert,' said he aloud, and knocked out some of the dust from his pipe on the slab above the vault; then put the meerschaum to his lips again and puffed away vigorously to restore the glow. 'I swear to you, old man, I'll do what is right as far as I know how. But, Lambert—the state of the matter is so mixed that, on my word, I hardly know what ought to be done. I must say it even here, my billy-boy—your

behaviour to your first wife was scurvy—I can't help it, scurvy is the word. And now in the light of eternity you know it, know it as well as I do, and are heartily sorry for it, and would like to have it otherwise. I must take that into consideration, and do something for Theresa. That's your present desire, I could swear it. But your past wish was to provide for the second wife—so I suppose I must do something too for that rhinoceros, Jane. I'll do it—and for the kid also, I mean Alice, she's a little dear too. But I shan't let her have Curgenven. I have to consider the feelings and the wishes of all the other corpses in there along with you, Lambert, as well, and you know as well as I do that Curgenven must have as its owner a Curgenven. Alice is a darling, but she might marry a Tompkins, and then there would be a Tompkins of Curgenven. That would never do. It wouldn't be the same even if Tompkins assumed our name. No—Curgenven goes to Justinian. That's certain, and that is as it should be. My conscience will justify me in determining that. But it's other bones about the widows. How you could throw aside Theresa for Jane passes my understanding. If you had first married Jane and then kicked her over, I could have gone with you there; I'd have done it myself. And that you should have taken Theresa—that's explicable. But having Theresa, to get into harness with that kangaroo—he shook his head. 'The world is full of puzzles. However, I need not bother my head about that. It was done. What am I to do? For nineteen years Theresa never had a penny from you, Lambert, more shame to you, and for sixteen or seventeen Jane has been spending as much of the Curgenven money as she cared to spend. That's not fair. To be even, Theresa should have a run on the property for sixteen or seventeen years, and then after that both go shares equally. But I can't go wholly by what is fair—I must go by the expressed intention of Lambert. There is the three hundred for the widow—that was a provision in the settlement. They shall have it turn and turn about, and toss up who is to have the first pull. I shall put away three hundred a year for Alice, to form a sum on which she may be comfortably off hereafter.'

Then there dashed down the church avenue a boy—the organ-blower released. A few minutes later Mrs. Jane Curgenven issued from the porch, with her nose in the air, turning it from side to side.

'Piff!' said she—'a very strong scent of tobacco.'

Mr. Percival at once removed his pipe and attempted to pocket it; but Mrs. Curgenven had seen him.

‘Really, Percival—smoking in the churchyard!—and at the vault! Upon my word—Percival—I could not have conceived that such a thing could be done!. Have you no religious feelings—no sense of decency?’

‘No harm meant, Jane.’

‘But harm is done.’

‘There is nothing wrong in smoking, any more than in smelling a scentbottle.’

‘There is wrong where there is indecorum. What is irreverent is profane, and what is profane is sinful.’

‘I’m very sorry, Jane. I’ll not do it again. I have knocked about in the West so much that I have forgotten some of the ways of civilisation.’

‘Of that I am well aware.’

‘I say, Jane. I want a word with you. I am deadly sorry for this unfortunate business about the two Mrs. Curgenvens.’

‘There is one only.’

‘The two wives, you know. I have been turning about in my head what is the right thing to do with you both.’

‘I do not want you to have anything to do with me,’ said Mrs. Curgenven, ‘and I refuse to be named in the same breath with another individual to whom you allude.’

‘It is only this,’ said Percival; ‘that three hundred pounds per annum must go to the two wives between them, somehow.’

‘If you speak like that you insult me.’

‘I—I wish a score of men would insult me by offering me three hundred a year.’

‘It is not that. *That* I admit I have a right to.’

‘Not a right, Jane. It is true three hundred a year was the sum settled that the widow should have. But then there are *two*, you know; and I think if you could see your way to share and share about, and to toss up who should begin—’

‘Mr. Percival,’ said Mrs. Curgenven haughtily, ‘if you mean this in joke, it speaks an obtuseness of moral sense which is deplorable. That you mean it seriously I cannot believe. Understand me for once and for all. I emphatically repudiate the notion of that abandoned woman having the smallest shadow of a right to be regarded as the wife of poor Lambert. If I submit to what my father has wished—that I waive my claim

and that of my child,—it is solely to spare his memory from being aspersed. Good evening. I wish you may learn to behave respectfully to a lady before you again address her. I am—till you marry—Mrs. Curgenven. *When you marry I am the dowager Mrs. Curgenven.* Understand that, mark, and digest it.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

DRUMDUSKIE.

THERESA arrived at the little station of Drumduskie, weary and sick. She had travelled night and day; owing to the fact of her having lent Mr. Percival Curgenven five shillings out of her journey money she had been too pinched to be able to obtain sufficient food of a sustaining nature on the way, and sausage-rolls and penny buns are not of a character, as supplied at refreshment stalls, to fortify the constitution to undergo a journey with hardly a break from Cornwall to Perth.

The vibration in the train for such a continuance had, moreover, occasioned Theresa a good deal of pain in her fractured but rapidly healing collar-bone. These two causes combined to depress her spirits and damp that energy, if not vehemence of character, which naturally belonged to her.

On getting out at the little station she found no carriage waiting for her, and no porter who could carry her box. No conveyance was kept by the station-master, and she was constrained to walk two miles to Drumduskie itself. She was disappointed and discouraged. Mrs. Boxholder knew by what train she was to arrive—she had been apprised of that; and Theresa for a moment felt uneasy lest she should have come on the wrong day. With her disengaged arm she felt in her pocket for Mrs. Boxholder's letter, opened it, and satisfied herself that she herself had made no mistake.

She accordingly walked on to Drumduskie—the first walk of any length she had taken since her accident. On reaching the front door, and learning that Mrs. Boxholder was out, but was expected in shortly, she felt relieved, as it enabled her to sit down and rest from the fatigue before encountering her future mistress.

Theresa had been too tired to notice the house and the grounds as she came up, but they made no impression of grandeur

on her. The servant who admitted her asked her to be seated in the hall until the lady returned, and as Theresa recovered from her exhaustion she looked around her. It was a fairly large entrance-hall, but the ceiling was very low, and there was a mark across it as though it were compounded of two rooms knocked into one by the removal of a wall. Some antlers of stags, old Scottish claymores, and a portrait, indifferently painted, furnished the walls, that were panelled in deal and painted to resemble oak.

Theresa remarked to the servant that her luggage was at the station, but the man doubted whether he could give orders for the boy to put the cob in the cart to fetch it before Mrs. Boxholder's return; he said he would ask her when she came in. She had gone for a constitutional walk, as the morning had been wet, and she never liked to be in all day. She had taken the young ladies with her.

After about a quarter of an hour the hall door opened, and a stout, short, sandy-whiskered gentleman, in knickerbockers and gaiters, came in. He was going through the hall to his room when he observed Theresa, came up to her, and held out his hand.

'How do you do—Mrs. Lambert, I suppose. I really hope you'll be happy here. Very glad to see you. The girls are not bad girls—when let alone. Is there anything I can do for you?'

He spoke in a very decidedly English accent, with a touch of cockneyism in it. Theresa thanked him, and mentioned her luggage.

'Oh yes, to be sure, it shall be seen to; but I'll just ask my wife first if we can have the spring-cart and the cob. I hope you'll get on well with her—but oh, here she is. I must be off;' and he skipped away into his smoking-room, nimble as a squirrel, as the door was thrust open with a certain imperiousness of manner that seemed to imply that the door stuck, and refused to open at its peril.

Then in came a very large stout lady, tall, with an eagle nose, very light hair, and very light eyelashes and pale eyes, followed by two girls.

'Oh! the new governess. Rose, Flora, take off your things in your rooms, and don't let them litter about. Now, understand me—no littering. Remain in your rooms till I send for you to come down.' The girls slunk upstairs.

'Oh! crippled!' exclaimed Mrs. Boxholder. 'My father

never informed me of that. This is serious. You never mentioned when you wrote that you were deprived of the use of an arm.'

Theresa had risen on the entrance of the lady, who seemed to swell and fill the hall, and choke the doors to the several rooms and obstruct the stairs, and who at the same time scented the atmosphere with a flavour of furs and black dye. She had both hands in a very big muff. After opening the door and observing Theresa she had thrust the right hand, to join the left, into the muff, and had not offered it to the new comer.

'I have met with an accident,' said Theresa, spots of angry fire kindling on her cheeks. 'But it will pass—I was thrown out of a gig and broke a collarbone, but my arm is uninjured. I shall shortly have it free once more.'

'That is well, for I shall want you to cut out. You cut out, I suppose?'

'After a fashion.'

'It must not be after *a* fashion, but after *the* fashion. Really it was too bad of my brother—he should have mentioned this. It is an expensive journey from Cornwall here—cost me a good deal of money, and one, of course, wishes to have someone who will answer my purpose and not be useless. I sincerely hope your collarbone will be well speedily. You are Mrs. Lambert—brevet rank, or real?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'I mean a real widow?'

'Yes—my husband is dead.'

'Long ago?'

'Not long ago.'

'What was he? I particularly told my father that I must have a lady—a real lady by birth.'

'I am very sorry—I am not that. By birth I am nothing, less than nothing.'

'Oh, but you don't speak like—like a common person. There are reasons, family reasons, why it is essential in this house that the governess should be perfectly correct in her intonation, absolutely free from all dialectic peculiarities—of course excepting a slight touch of Scottish, to which I should not object. That there should be a strong counteracting influence to—let us say cockney twang—is, unfortunately, most important. I am glad you have not that.'

‘I was thoroughly well educated by the kindest and most refined of ladies.’

‘I am sorry about your birth; but your husband, what was he?’

‘He was a captain in the navy.’

‘In the commercial service, I suppose.’

‘No, in Her Majesty’s navy.’

‘Oh—that is something. No children?’

‘No children at all.’

‘I see you don’t wear a widow’s cap. I suppose you thought it as well not—as a governess. I have never seen a governess in a widow’s cap, and—so it is best not. I suppose you have a pension from Government?’

‘I have none.’

‘How is that? Your husband in Her Majesty’s Service, as captain, and you his widow, and no pension! I don’t understand it. I thought that always—but I’ll call Drumduskie. No, I’ll go to him and consult about this—it is odd. By the way, I suppose you are hungry; you shall have some tea. I think before anything is absolutely settled I’ll consult Drumduskie.’

Mr. Boxholder had been a London cornfactor. His mother had been a McNaught of Drumduskie. The McNaughts of Drumduskie were inconsiderable—something between farmers and lairds; but when the McNaught property came to the cornfactor, Mrs. Boxholder insisted on his retiring from business on the respectable fortune he had made, and setting up as a Scottish laird at Drumduskie. He himself was a plain man, with no pretence, who had been happy in his commercial world, and found it difficult to fit himself for the new sphere into which he was plunged by the dominant will of his wife. She always spoke and wrote of him as Drumduskie; his Christian name, happily, was McNaught, so there was just a flavour of Scotland about him. Her persistence in converting the cornfactor into laird of Drumduskie amused the neighbours, annoyed her husband, but caused unbounded admiration in the bosoms of all the Pamphlet family, which flattered itself that it had two of its female members well married, one into an ancient Cornish squirearchical family, seated on its ancestral acres from prehistoric times—certainly from before the Conquest; the other into a Scottish family of patriarchal dignity and manners, with its proper tartan, of course, and its clan, its bagpipes, its own Drumduskie march,

and its devoted adherents among the lower classes, who would die cheerfully for Drumduskie, their chief. If Mrs. Boxholder could have had her way in every point she would have put the corn-factor into a kilt and bared his knees; but though he was a yielding man to her in many, indeed in most matters, in this he was obdurate; he tried to split the difference by wearing a very loud plaid suit, but this did not content madam, and she was now engaged in girding at him to join the Highland militia, so as to furnish some occasions in which he could wear the kilt and flourish his bare knees, and some excuse for appearing in his uniform on official and festal occasions; some justification for being painted, with a sheep-dog at his side—not for the hall, as that was too low to receive so large a portrait—but for the drawing-room, which had been built on to the old house by Mrs. Boxholder to suit modern tastes, and her ideas as to what a reception-room of the Lady of Drumduskie should be.

Presently Mrs. Boxholder returned into the hall, and said to Theresa, ‘I should like to know the reason why you are not in receipt of a pension.’

‘Mr. Pamphlet knew the reason, and was quite satisfied. But I am not sure that I have any claim on Government, as my husband left the navy.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed the lady, ‘that was it. That did not occur to me. He left it voluntarily, of course.’

‘Perfectly voluntarily.’

‘And he was a gentleman by birth?’

‘He was.’

‘Well, I hope all will be well. I relied on my father, who is a most admirable man, and who, I have no doubt, would send me no one objectionable, though I own I was surprised that Mrs. Curgenven made no reply when I wrote to her. She does not know you, I suppose.’

‘I believe that on one occasion she saw me—know me she certainly does not.’

‘Well, we will hope for the best. You must be very particular about the girls being tidy. Flora has a way of coming down late for prayers, and scrambling through her dressing, and not always using her toothbrush; you must see to that. Rose is wonderfully clever at everything but self-adornment. I have had to complain repeatedly of potatoes in her stockings. Now you are here, mind, plenty of toothbrush for Flora, and no potatoes for

Rose. By the way, it was a long and expensive journey. I suppose you must be hungry. I'll have in some tea. Oh! and perhaps you would like to see your room. I'll ring and send a maid with you.'

Then Mrs. Boxholder went to her husband.

'Drumduskie, I believe it is right. Her husband left the navy. That is why there is no widow's pay. I'll send for her luggage. I did not on purpose order a trap to meet her; it is as well at once to impress on a new comer that she is to take a subservient place—must expect to be overlooked. It produces an effect at once, without a word, you understand, Drumduskie.'

'Quite so, my dear; no one understands the art of snub better than yourself.'

'You are extremely rude. It is very hard to get people to know their places. You, for instance, need continual reminders to occupy your proper position. Some folks have to be poked up, others to be pushed down.'

Theresa was shown to her bedroom. There was no fire burning in the grate—none was laid. None apparently had been laid in it, or certainly kindled since the grate was put in, for the firebricks at the back were not blackened.

The room was not uncomfortable. It looked to the north, and had a small window. It was furnished with everything that was necessary and nothing beyond, save a bookcase, in which were books of old divinity—Blair's sermons, Leighton on S. Peter, and a few dreary memoirs of very dull good men, who never did anything interesting in their lives, who never did anything at all, to judge from their biographies, except write letters full of piety, written under the sense that they were some day to be published.

Theresa seated herself on the bed, and waited for her box to arrive. She was tired and discouraged. The phase of life on which she was entering seemed to her the worst with which experience had made her acquainted. There was no help for it, she must remain at Drumduskie to be browbeaten by this woman, to be made to work as a slave. She could not leave; she had no money to carry her anywhere, and wherever she went she must do something to earn her bread. Was one way much worse than another, now that the artistic career was closed to her? In that artistic career, along with much that was objectionable there was change, there was a certain freedom, and there was enthusiasm for art to carry her along. In this occupation she

had undertaken there might, indeed, be interests if her pupils were attractive girls, with warm hearts and well-developed intelligences. If they were apt to learn she would find an interest in teaching, if they were ready to love she would find a delight in gaining their affection.

She must avoid Mrs. Boxholder as much as possible. The lady was a bustling person, who would probably have much to occupy her, and that would keep her out of the schoolroom.

Theresa recalled the strange proposal of Mr. Percival Curgenven through the carriage window, and did not know what to make of it. Was he in earnest, or was it 'chaff'? He had lived much in the far West—gone cattle ranching, gold digging; he had mixed with all kinds of persons in the Western States, and had fallen into an offhand, rollicking manner; he said things he meant seriously in a joking manner, and he made his jokes without a muscle of his face relaxing. What he meant Theresa did not know. She placed no great confidence in his sincerity when he spoke. If he really did wish her hand, he would write. If he did not write then she might conclude that what he shouted through the window was a bit of his nonsense. She put the thought of Percival from her mind, to think only of her present position, and of the duties she had undertaken.

Weary with her long journey, and sick and faint with hunger, she sank on the bed and fell asleep. She was awakened by the maid and the groom entering with her box.

'Here you are, Miss, and please—when you've tidied yourself a bit, your hair, and washed—missus says you are to come down to tea.'

Theresa, stupid with sleep, raised her head from the pillow and said, 'I want nothing.'

'Lor!' exclaimed the maid; 'if missus says you are to eat, eat you must. No one here can do what they like; they must do what missus orders, so clean yourself a bit and come down.' The groom had left the room.

'Lor! you poor creetur,' said the maid. 'Well, now, if you haven't been crying! And you've a bad arm. Come, give me the key, and I'll unpack your box for you, missus notwithstanding, who said I wasn't to do nothing of the kind, so as you mightn't come to expect to be waited upon.'

CHAPTER XIX.

IN A SITUATION.

NEXT day Theresa made acquaintance with her pupils. Of these Rose, the elder, was supposed by her mother, and supposed herself to be highly accomplished. She was to be finished. Flora, the younger, was admitted to be backward, and to need teaching from the rudiments. Rose was, her mother bade Theresa observe, a beauty of a striking and exceptional character. She was, in fact, not bad looking, but to an unprejudiced eye would not be accounted beautiful. She had her mother's nose; she was supercilious, and did not believe that anything she could be taught would improve her—anything, that is to say, which a forty pound governess could teach. A music-master at a guinea a lesson might give her a hint that would improve her touch, and a Parisian governess at a hundred per annum might assist her in acquiring fluency in French. Theresa found that her attempts to instruct Rose were received with stolid contempt. Rose played the piano without feeling, she sang out of tune, her French pronunciation was execrable, and she knew nothing of Italian or German, and because she knew nothing of these languages held their literature as sovereignly stupid, and entirely beneath consideration.

Flora was in face like her father, sandy of hair, irregular of feature, with more flesh in her face than bone and muscle. She was an uninteresting child, listless in manner, unintelligent, and though not unamiable, yet incapable of appreciating affection. She was obedient, but gave little promise of her studies leading to any other result than the exhaustion of the powers and patience of her teacher. Rose, Theresa found, was ready to be actively disagreeable; Flora to be passively uninteresting.

The weather was wet. The rain had come on during the night, and a steady downpour lasted all day.

The governess and children had luncheon with Mr. and Mrs. Boxholder in the dining-room at one o'clock. After lunch the lady of the house told Rose to be ready to drive with her that afternoon to pay a few obligatory visits.

'You, Mrs. Lambert, will take Flora out for a walk.'

'In the rain?' asked Theresa.

'In this family we always take constitutionals, whatever the weather be. You have, of course, an umbrella?'

'Yes, I have one.'

'And a waterproof?'

'I am sorry to say I have not.'

'Then you will be wet through. No one should come to Scotland without a waterproof. Knowledge is only to be acquired by experience. After a sousing rain in Perthshire, and getting wet to the bone, you will remember to the end of your life to have a waterproof with you when you come to Scotland. I make a point of my children taking exercise every day, for an hour at least. Let me see, you do not know the country. Suppose you go as far as the Seven Dubs. Flora—the Seven Dubs to-day; you will show your governess the way; and tell me on your return what observable things you have seen in the hedges, in the sky, on the road. Remember the story of "Eyes and no Eyes." Mrs. Lambert, you will direct the child's attention to everything that may improve her mind and ought to arrest her attention and quicken observation, to everything that may be encountered *en route* to Seven Dubs and back—except, of course, men.'

The carriage was driven to the front door to receive Mrs. Boxholder and her eldest daughter. The former was in the hall before Rose had come down.

'Mrs. Lambert,' said the lady, 'you will please to see that I always take Miss Boxholder about with me. I cannot trust her with anyone whom I do not know and on whom I cannot rely. You perceive she is so very attractive—such a beauty; and there are all sorts of persons about the roads—people from the South, tourists, and what not, concerning whom one knows nothing; and a lively girl and an heiress—for she will inherit Drumduskie, as well as her father's wealth from other sources—must be guarded most carefully. Some day or other, perhaps I may let her go out a walk with you—not to-day. You will remember to cultivate the mind and form the taste of Miss Flora on your constitutional.'

When Mrs. Boxholder had driven off with Rose, Theresa stood in the porch looking despondingly at the rain, holding her small umbrella in the only hand she could use. She had a light lady's cloak, too light to resist the rain.

Then Mr. Boxholder appeared in the hall, looking about him.

'Miss Lambert,' said he, 'I cannot really permit you to get

drenched. Of course you must take the hour's walk, as my wife has ordered it; but you positively must wear some protection against the weather. I think—perhaps I might venture—I am sure my wife has got a waterproof, and I have no doubt we can get it shaken out and dried before she returns, and so will know nothing about it having been used.'

'Oh, thank you most kindly,' said Theresa. 'I should not venture to put on anything of hers without her permission.'

'Perhaps you are right. Yes. It would be awkward were it not dried in time and hung up in its accustomed place, and she were to discover—upon my word I don't know what we should do. Now consider this. I have a light waterproof overcoat. It won't in the least matter your wearing that. No one will be on the road—not a carter, even—in this detestable weather. Will you excuse me, and put on my overcoat. 'Pon my word it won't look amiss, and it will keep you dry as snuff.'

'Really, Mr. Boxholder, you are most kind; but——'

'But positively it does my heart good to be called plain Boxholder, and not lairded and Drumduskied. You won't?—well, go out in this rain unprotected you shall not. Let me see! The gig umbrella! no, that is too heavy for you to hold up. I have it, my tartan—the Drumduskie plaid excogitated by her ladyship. Spread it out and use it as a shawl. Bless you! if she does see it has been rained upon she'll be as pleased as Punch, thinking I have been out figuring in my tartan. She'll never fancy you wore it. And I'll take a turn afterwards round the garden in it, and then, with a white conscience, swear I wore it.'

The good-natured cornfactor would take no refusal: he enveloped Theresa in the plaid.

'There,' said he, 'that's first-rate. Don't you be afraid that Flora will peach. Not she. She's too much afraid of mammy, ain't you, Flora?'

Then back into his smoking-room dived Drumduskie, and Theresa and her pupil sallied forth into the rain.

It was not possible through the veil of descending raindrops to see anything of the landscape, or much in the hedges, on which to comment for the illumination and nutriment of the pupil's mind; and of travellers along the road there were none.

'What are the Seven Dubs?' asked Theresa.

'I don't know,' answered Flora.

'But you know where they are?'

‘Yes—I think so.’

‘Are there seven anythings there?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know. But please, Mrs. Lambert, don’t ask me questions. Mamma said I was to inquire of you, and not be put off, she said, by being questioned myself.’

Days and weeks passed at Drumduskie. Days not always wet; but fair as well as wet, all went on in the house in the same routine of lessons, meals, and walks. Flora was catechised by her mother every few days, and then Theresa was lectured by her on the disappointment occasioned by the slow progress made by the unfortunate child.

‘The talents are there,’ said Mrs. Boxholder, tapping the low dull brow of the girl; ‘they have to be brought out. That is your work. That is what is expected of you, Mrs. Lambert. She is a Drumduskie, and therefore cannot be a fool, and no folly, I can assure you, comes to her from the Pamphlets. The Pamphlets are a remarkably active-minded family. No—the faculties are locked in the child, and what we want is to have them drawn out. I am sorry that so far, somehow, you do not seem to have hit on the right system, or that you have gone the wrong way to work—Flora does not seem to me to have got on a bit.’

Again and again did Theresa ask herself whether it would be possible for her to endure the slavery in this house for an entire twelvemonth. She was forced to exercise over herself the greatest control, when her blood boiled up at the insolence of the woman who was mistress of the place. The poor girl, Flora, cowered before her mother—was worried by her into stupidity or sullenness. She really had few abilities, unhappily she had no more loveableness in her than exists in a bit of putty; yet Mr. Boxholder loved best this his youngest, and sought occasion to show her his fondness, unobserved by his wife, who rebuked him when she detected him with Flora, as spoiling the girl, and distracting her mind from her lessons. There was no escape possible for Theresa—she had no money, and must remain at Drumduskie, and endure what was put on her, till she had earned sufficient to enable her to leave. She had, moreover, more than half engaged to stay the twelvemonth with the Boxholders when an arrangement had been made relative to her going there.

A month passed before a line reached her from Mr. Percival Curgenven, and that was a mere apology for not having returned the borrowed five shillings earlier. The matter had escaped his

recollection, he said, owing to the press of affairs on his attention consequent on his entering on possession of the estate. He did enclose a post-office order for a crown, and for a crown only. He had apparently forgotten his offer of three hundred pounds, and also his offer of himself.

The receipt of this letter a little discouraged Theresa. She was too sensible to allow that she had a right to feel real disappointment, and yet under the depressing atmosphere of Drumduskie this did somewhat weigh on her spirits. She had built no sort of hopes on the offer that had been made her, but she felt that she had a right to be hurt at the frivolous and inconsiderate manner in which she had been treated—an offer made her, though through a carriage window, and he who made the offer never troubling himself to know whether it were accepted or not, and apparently not concerning himself whether it had been taken seriously or as a joke.

After a while Theresa was able to use her left arm again. The nearest surgeon was called in to advise when she might discard the sling. 'But you understand,' said Mrs. Boxholder, 'he will send in his account for professional attendance to you, Mrs. Lambert. We do not pay the bills of our governesses, or they would be always shamming sickness, and running up tremendous accounts. They cost us enough as it is.'

Some trouble arose occasionally from Mr. Boxholder being discovered in the schoolroom, or from his exchanging a few words with Theresa, whom he insisted on designating *Miss*, though corrected repeatedly by his wife. He went into the schoolroom to see his favourite child, kiss her and encourage her; and he spoke to Theresa when he had an opportunity, out of kindness of heart. At table at meals he might not look across at her, or in any other direction than his wife, or address any observations to Theresa. To do so provoked unpleasantnesses.

Theresa was surprised at first to find that the servants in the house were English. By degrees the reason came out. Mrs. Boxholder so worried her domestics that no Scotch girls would remain with her, and she was obliged to obtain her servants from England, and from a great distance, so as to ensure their remaining in their places. By this means she had them at her mercy, or, to be more correct, at her disposal, for at least six months, owing to the expense of the return journey to England. The two girls, Rose and Flora, had, moreover, gone through the hands of

a succession of governesses, who had had the moulding of them each for a very brief space; either Mrs. Boxholder had made life at Drumduskie unendurable to the ladies, and they had thrown up the situation, or the lady had bundled them off because they did not prove tractable under her objurgations. The systems under which the girls had been taught varied with their governesses. One held by 'Mangnall's Questions' and Blair's 'Compendium of the Sciences'; another followed the last approved methods of the schools. One grounded and another topped; one went upon the system of making all instruction palatable, teaching history through James's and Scott's Novels, and geography through imaginary voyages; another by reducing all instruction to bare bones, making of it a hard list of names and dates and unpalatable and indigestible facts.

Theresa found that the fresh air of Scotland was restoring her strength, her spirits, and that vigour of mind which had carried her through life hitherto, but which had given way temporarily under sickness and disappointment. Her blood began to circulate faster, her eye resumed its fire; and as her health was restored, with it came a combative spirit that ill-brooked the overbearing manners of Mrs. Boxholder. That lady little knew how nearly she drove her governess to an outbreak; but Theresa had acquired self-control in her professional career, and she was able to restrain herself under provocation, and await her own convenience for leaving Drumduskie. She was well aware that if she departed before six months were up Mrs. Boxholder would withdraw from her salary the sum that the journey had cost from Liskeard to Perth.

(To be continued.)

THE PEERAGE IN CHINA.

CHINESE titles are regarded as a species of office, qualifying the holder to draw pay from the treasury, but requiring from him at the same time the performance of certain duties. In our own more civilised land the peers need do nothing (they *need* not throw out the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill); but then neither do they receive anything, unless they have the good fortune to be descended from the Merrie Monarch. In China a title can only be gained by success in war. No amount of quibbling at the bar, no brewings, however excellent, of draught stout will make a man a peer. The most persuasive of special pleaders this backward people would, in the figurative language of the third emperor of the dynasty, describe as 'a bare stick,' and, if they followed literally his late Majesty's advice, soundly drub. Even the makers of samshoo, the national (and nasty) drink, are held in no great repute. You must, if you would be ennobled, either take a town from the rebels, or, what is equally efficacious, commit suicide when the rebels are taking it from you. The Chinese of all nations perhaps have the most vivid realisation of a future existence—for, as a rule, it is the heroic ghost who gets the title, his son succeeding him after three years or so as second peer. In the pages of the *Peking Gazette*, that exhaustless storehouse of quaint facts, are many accounts of this ennoblement of dead heroes. The sequel to one such story throws so much light on the position and prospects of a Chinese peer (albeit a peer of low degree), that it is worth transcribing in full. It is in the form of a petition to the censorate at Peking:—

'I am 32 years of age and come from Linch'ing in Shantung. In the year 1854 my father, who was a trainband captain, lost his life at the attack on our native town made by the rebels, and so distinguished himself that he was created a *yün ch'i-yü*. As his eldest son I succeeded to the title, and in 1871 I joined the garrison at Linch'ing to learn my military duties. The major in command, whose one idea was self-enrichment, paid me only 11 crowns (55s.) at the end of nearly a year's service instead of the 19 crowns (5*l.*) to which I was entitled; and, again, only paid me 12 crowns as my salary for the spring and autumn. A fellow *yün ch'i-yü* was treated in the same manner, and we made a joint

complaint to the major, who took a dislike to us in consequence, and falsely declared that as our papers had not arrived he was not allowed to issue full pay to us. The mother of my colleague complained to the provincial treasurer of these deductions in her son's pay, and he referred the matter to the prefect of Chinan. The major, knowing well that his excuses were false, got hold of my colleague and kept him in hiding, so that he could not appear at the inquiry; finally he forced him to poison himself. The major again issued reduced pay to me in the year 1874, and at last turned me out of the garrison on the ground that I had delayed in presenting myself at a certain military review.'

A *yün ch'i-yü* is the eighth of the nine ranks into which the national—as distinguished from the imperial—nobility is divided. Chinese names are a weariness to Western ears; but it really is very difficult to avoid them altogether when treating of Chinese peers. The first five ranks may be rendered, and commonly are rendered, by our 'duke,' 'marquis,' 'earl,' 'viscount,' and 'baron'. The sixth rank, which literally translated is that of 'light-charioted city-warden,' might by parity of reasoning be turned by 'baronet'; but as no successor of the most high but rather hard-up prince, King James, has followed his example and created hereditary knights, squires, or, shall we say? squireens, it is not easy to find fitting equivalents for the last three grades. These, the 'mounted city-warden,' the 'cloud mounted-warden,' and the 'mounted-warden by grace,' are perhaps best expressed, on paper, by their quaint if unpronounceable originals, *ch'i tu-yü*, *yün ch'i-yü*, and *ên ch'i-yü*.

There are only two Chinese *kung*, or dukes, not of the imperial blood. These are the Yen-sheng Kung, the 'Duke Transmitter of the Sage,' the representative of Confucius; and the Hai-cheng Kung, 'Purifier of the Seas,' the descendant of Huang, conqueror of Formosa for the Manchus. The latter title is some two centuries old, the former was instituted in 1233. 'The Confucian Duke,' as he is commonly styled by foreigners, enjoys a prestige which no change of dynasty affects; yet perhaps a native essayist two or three years ago took too audacious advantage of this fact. He had noticed that the ostensible unity of the Roman Catholics gave them an amount of power which he, as a Confucianist, could not but deprecate; he urged, therefore, that there be established throughout China a Confucian hierarchy (with Confucian bishops *in partibus*), and at the head of that hierarchy be placed the Transmitter of the Sage, as an orthodox Chinese Pope.

The present Purifier of the Seas, Huang Pao-ch'êng, is a colonel in the provincial army of Fukien, his native province. It is indeed obligatory on every Chinese noble to serve in some military capacity, unless he has reached a certain rank in the civil service, or is content, as was a remarkable *yün ch'i-yü* last year, to forego his allowance. That, we should think, would be no great hardship, if all he could draw was some 5*l.* a year—though 5*l.* a year would almost feed a family in China. These allowances, like all Chinese official salaries, were cut down in the troublous times of Hsien-feng, when the Taipings held Nanking and the Allies were bombarding Taku; but they were to be paid in full from and after New Year's Day (Feb. 3) 1886. They are provided out of the provincial funds, and the consequence is a rooted objection on the part of provincial treasurers to the creation of new peers. In 1884 the Governor of Kiangsi petitioned the throne on the subject. 'Already,' he wrote, 'there is an annual call of over 50,000 crowns to meet the salaries of the hereditary nobles, and unless some means are adopted of reducing the expenditure under this head, it will be impossible to continue to meet the call. Other provinces, and prefectures in those provinces, have had limitations laid down as to the number of holders of hereditary nobility. In Hunan, for instance, the number is limited to 400; in Nanking to 348; in Soochow to 150; in Anhui to 176. In Kiangsi there are already 483, which is more than anywhere else; still, as it would not be humane to cut down the number abruptly, I would propose to reduce the salaries paid by a certain percentage, and to limit the recipients to the present number, viz., 483.' Peers were not over well paid in Kiangsi as it was, for the Governor's figures give to each an average salary of but little more than 103 crowns, or some 25*l.* a year. A similar memorial from Fukien, in 1887, makes the average only 57 crowns for 360 recipients. What is the total number of nobles in China does not, in the absence of a Chinese Burke, appear; but from the memorials we may take it to be between two and three thousand for the eighteen provinces. This absence of a Burke, by the way, is sometimes felt even by Peking. When Tso Tsung-t'ang was engaged in the recovery of Kashgar he recommended one of his generals for promotion in the peerage. The Court, in a very good humour at the signal success of the Chinese arms, had already made Tso a marquis, and his right-hand man and future successor in the governorship of the reconquered country, Liu Chin-t'ang, a Baron. They acceded promptly

to Tso's request and created his general a 'mounted city-warden.' Then Tso wrote again and respectfully pointed out that the general was already—had, in fact, for some time been—a mounted city-warden. Matters were finally arranged by making him a 'light-chariot warden' instead; but there really seems to have been bad management somewhere.

The troubles of these wardens often find their way into the *Gazette*. One *yün ch'i-yü* suffered in 1874 through overmuch zeal. 'Wishing to perfect himself in rifle-shooting for the monthly competition, he was in the habit of practising at a target in a mulberry plantation which stood in some waste land in an unfrequented spot within the walls. One day in October when he was shooting, two men came with some donkeys along the neighbouring road. One of the donkeys ran off the road, and the driver in following it came into the line of fire, and was killed by the *yün ch'i-yü*, who could not see him for the trees.' The unlucky noble was punished by banishment to a place a thousand miles away, by a hundred blows administered on an ignominious portion of his person, and a fine of 2*l.* 10*s.* to pay for his victim's funeral—a very characteristic Chinese sentence. Apparently his nobility did not save him from the indignity of a beating, as the lowest scholarly degree would have done. If this is so, it is not to be wondered at that men of his class are anxious to secure such degree. They hesitate, however, to enter the lists—as a very curious memorial from the Hanlin pointed out in 1882—'through a fear of possible loss of their title should they do so.' This is as though a baronet of the United Kingdom should shrink from 'Smalls' lest he ultimately be ploughed in 'Greats,' and thereby lose his rank. The Hanlin proposed, as a relief measure, that baronets and the rest should, as was once the rule, 'be by virtue of their titles eligible for the triennial examinations, and able to compete for the usual degrees without prejudice to their position.' That is, they were to be given their 'Mods.' *testamur* without entering the schools, and allowed to have a shot at their B.A. without running the disagreeable risk of forfeiting their rank and their five pounds or so of yearly pay. This pay, small as it is, they would not in any case be entitled to draw in full until they were 18 years old, nor would they necessarily receive it when incapacitated for duty by age, so that a paid peerage is not quite such an object of envy as it might and should be.

The general rule of succession to a Chinese title is the same as with us; that is to say, the eldest son by the legal wife

succeeds. If there is no son by the wife, then a son by a hand-maid may take the title, just as the Mikado of Japan, so lauded for his civilised ways by Sir Edwin Arnold, will be succeeded by a prince whom in the West we should regard as illegitimate. The practice must tend to make titles more permanent than with us; but as if even this were insufficient to the end, it constantly happens that in the absence of sons a title is passed on to a nephew or cousin. The reason for this proceeding appears in a memorial published in 1874. One Chang Chih-Kung had been killed in action; whereupon the crown bestowed the title of 'mounted warden' on his nephew. The nephew turned traitor, and being caught lost title and head. It was now urged that the forfeited title 'should be revived in the next line, *in order to soothe the ghost of Chang Chih-Kung.*' It does not follow, as has been already said, that the successor will be granted the same rank. An earldom referred to in the *Gazette* for 1872 was 'to be hereditary for sixteen generations, after which the holder was to receive the rank of "warden by grace" in perpetuity.' In 1864 a brigadier-general who had distinguished himself at the recapture of Nanking from the Taipings, was made a viscount. He died of his wounds the following month. Nine years after his death a baby nephew was adopted as heir to his ghost, and upon him was bestowed the title not of viscount, but of *yün ch'i-yü*. Sometimes, but very rarely, the title is inherited by a brother. One such case had a curious issue. The inheritor, like his brother, died unmarried. Before that happened, however, he had left his record of services, his patent of nobility, and his genealogical table, in charge of a young clansman. The clansman rose to the occasion. Giving himself out to be the son of the deceased, and getting two friends to stand as the necessary sureties, he made application through the local authorities for permission to succeed. This was granted him, and he was sent as military secretary to a battalion. His captain's suspicions, however, were presently aroused (how, it does not appear), and the new peer was arrested and sent for trial before the district magistrate. (There is no trial of peers by peers in China.) He 'proved contumacious,' but as he was identified by an uncle, the magistrate felt justified in sending him before the provincial judge, who found him guilty. The legal sentence was penal servitude for life, but by virtue of a fortunate Act of Grace (consequent on the recovery of the Empress Dowager) this was commuted into banishment for three years, a beating, and repayment of any

salary drawn. A similar sentence was passed in 1883 upon another impostor, a captain in the army, who previous to detection had received 617 crowns as salary. The utmost efforts of the officials could only recover some seventy-two dollars, after selling up the whole of the captain's possessions. As for the penal servitude, the offender got off that on the plea that 'a rheumatic affection of the legs brought on in military expeditions against banditti had been so aggravated by the confinement he had undergone' that he could not walk to the place of banishment. The reason why severe sentences are, at all events on paper, passed against such impostors is because their proceedings amount to a fraud on the revenue. On such a ground even Mr. Labouchere would object to the casual assumption of titles by persons who had no right to them.

Courtesy titles are unknown in China. It is true that an adopted son of Li Hung-chang—who was made an earl for the victories Gordon helped him to gain—has posed as 'Lord Li' or 'Viscount Li' in London and elsewhere; but he probably, nay certainly, owes this, not to his own vanity or the grace of his emperor, but to too flattering foreign friends. An Englishman 'dearly loves a lord,' and the opportunity to my-lord the Viceroy's son (now Chinese minister at Tokio) was too good to be lost. As a matter of fact he will not succeed as Earl Po-i (the Grand Secretary's title) if Li Hung-chang leaves a son by blood. Indeed it is not only premature but presumptuous for any man to give himself out as necessarily the successor to a Chinese title. The ordinary procedure is for the provincial authorities to report the death of a noble, and for the Emperor thereupon to direct them to ascertain who should be appointed to succeed him. In the case of the late Tso Tsung-t'ang, who was both a marquis and a baronet, the authorities of Fukien suggested that his eldest grandson might take the marquisate, and one of his younger sons the baronetcy. Tso, by the way, had at one period of his life been a baron and at another an earl, but as the memorialists said nothing about these titles it is to be assumed that they were absorbed in the marquisate, not held concurrently with it, as would have been the case with us, and indeed was the case with Tso's baronetcy. The only instance in the *Gazette* for the last twenty years where a successor has been recognised in his father's lifetime is found in the volume for 1880, and the reason there plainly appears in the fact that the noble having no sons by his

wife wished the succession to be confirmed on his eldest son by a handmaid. This proceeding would prevent a claim being brought forward after his death by some other son, as was actually done in 1883. The Marquis Wênhou died leaving four sons, but none, as was supposed, by his legal wife. The eldest son under these circumstances succeeded to the title, and on his death childless it reverted to the third son, the second having passed out of the family by adoption. About this time the youngest son overheard his supposed mother say to her daughter that he was really the child of the wife, who died when he was born. She, so she said, had pretended that the baby was hers in order that her own son might not be ousted from the succession (as he would be if he had a legitimate brother, however many years his junior). Not long after this exciting disclosure the handmaid died, and the then marquis, her eldest son, called on his youngest brother to join him in mourning for her. He refused on the ground that she was but a stepmother at best, whereupon the marquis 'made the servants cut off forcibly a piece of his queue and place it in the mother's hand,' a ceremony which the translator, Mr. Hillier, explained, 'is always performed by children at the death of their parents.' It is rather disappointing to have to add that here again a very natural ambition was baulked by an uncle's interference. The brother of the late marquis, to whom the court referred as an authority, was unkind enough to declare that his brother's wife (a princess of the blood, by the bye) died two years before the claimant was born, on which the court decided that she was, most probably, not the claimant's mother.

When, on the death of a Chinese peer, an imperial decree has been obtained nominating his successor, it does not follow that that successor can at once assume the title, and draw his pay. On the contrary, he is required first of all to go into mourning for his father, grandfather, or uncle, as the case may be. If he is a Manchu he can get this over in a hundred days—for the Manchus were a practical folk, and, though they yielded something to Chinese prejudices, would not yield too much—but if he is a Chinaman he must mourn for twenty-seven months. This was the cause why the late Marquis Tseng did not, though his father died in 1872, take up the title until September 1874, when he was again called into a second twenty-seven months' mourning for his mother. His mourning over, the new peer should go to court and be presented to the Emperor. There are, apparently, no succession fees, though the officials of the Boards concerned—the Home

Office and the Horse Guards of China—contrive to exact fees on the first issue of a patent. These patents should be made of the best white silk, and on them should be printed a copy of the decree granting the title. It is melancholy, though not altogether surprising, to learn, however, from the confession of a censor, that the generality of patents 'are inscribed on material of the most inferior description, coarse and loosely woven, and made up with a minimum of silk and a maximum of solidified dye.'

Peers of the United Kingdom cannot be deprived of their titles by anything less forcible than an Act of Parliament, but in China simpler processes suffice. In the last twenty years nearly as many Chinese nobles have lost their titles (not their patents, though to be sure one unfortunate did do this, in a fire, and was punished for it, poor man). The reasons for the deprivation are exceedingly varied. Most of the sufferers are deprived provisionally of their honours, 'in order to trial,' which, as trial means beating, shows that a title does not serve, like a literary degree, to protect from indiscriminate bambooings. Liu Ming-chuan, till lately the Governor of Formosa, was in his younger days, some nineteen years ago, stripped of his baronetcy, because, as commander-in-chief in Chihli, he had been guilty of 'tricky behaviour.' His successor had complained that 'the number of invalids and persons on furlough still drawing pay was enormous.' That battalion, it should be explained, had just been ordered off to the north-west to fight the Mohammedans, and neither Liu nor his troops wanted to go.

The next noble to lose his rank is described succinctly as a 'local bully.' His offence was 'kicking open a nunnery door and carrying off a young and comely novice.' A lieutenant is deprived of his wardenship, because, when sent on service, he 'dared to beat the soldiers in the batteries, and demanded an excessive supply of sheep,' which the court characterised, very justly, as 'a most outrageous and improper proceeding.' A *ch'i tu-yü* is sentenced to lose his title, because, in spite of the remonstrances of the aggrieved husband, he 'persisted in his attempts at seduction.' Breaches of the seventh commandment appear, indeed, to always involve loss of rank. One such offender in 1885, taken *in flagrante*, whose 'explanations were unsatisfactory,' was condemned besides to a hundred blows with the heavy bamboo, without the option of a fine.

Sometimes the Chinese peer is fined and not attainted. The notorious Yang Yü-k'o, who knew more of the murder of poor

Margary than the Chinese Government cared to admit, was in 1880 deprived of one-half of his salary as a baron for the next nine years, because he had 'opened a money shop.' A few months later the Emperor forgave him. A still graver offender against foreigners—for there can be no doubt of his complicity in the Tientsin Massacre—the scoundrel Chen Kuo-jui, was also forgiven, but not till after his death. His rank was allowed, in 1883, to devolve upon his nephew, whom he had adopted before the boy's birth. Chinese titles rarely suffer from 'corruption of blood'; for even when a peccant peer has been attained and dies unforgiven, his title is frequently passed on to his next heir. This may, indeed generally does, take place in his lifetime. Thus in 1886 a young *yün ch'i-yü* is denounced by his colonel as 'a disgrace to the service,' because his conduct, particularly in the matter of drills, was far from correct, while he 'refused to amend his ways in spite of repeated reprimands and cautions.' He lost his title, but the Board was directed to find him a successor. A much harder case occurred two years later. Another *yün ch'i-yü* was in charge of an outpost, and in his judicial capacity administered twenty blows to a refractory soldier who had bullied a shop-keeper. The soldier died, and the 'cloud-warden' was indicted for manslaughter. The court held that the soldier deserved a flogging, that the flogging was administered on a proper part of the person, and that the number of blows was moderate. Nevertheless as the man had died, the officer 'was deprived of his hereditary post, to which another member of his family will succeed.' A fellow 'cloud-warden' in 1878 had slightly better fortune. He had outstayed his leave—he was in the Foochow garrison—by six months, and for this offence was sentenced in his absence to the loss of his title. He returned at last and reported that he had gone with his wife to see her parents. There a son had been born to him, and two months afterwards he started to rejoin his corps. His wife, however, fell seriously ill, and when she at last recovered he himself caught an infection, and became delirious. His funds were by this time exhausted, and he had to borrow money to return when he did. In consideration of all these circumstances might not his forfeited title be bestowed on the baby? . . . One is very glad to find from the rescript that his Majesty, who was not very far advanced from babyhood himself then, was pleased to grant this prayer and ennoble Master Baby—surely the queerest creation in all the queer peerage of China.

CRANBORNE CHASE.

IN one of the most delectable regions of South-Western England was situated the famous chase of Cranborne—a vast expanse of heath, down, and woodland, comprising a considerable portion of three counties, seventy-two parishes, numerous townships and hamlets, and a total population of something like twelve thousand inhabitants.

Although several tracts of country in various parts of England still bear the name of 'chase,' the precise significance of that term may not be universally understood. Briefly, the term denoted the exclusive right of sporting over a certain area, irrespective of ownership of lands situated therein. A chase differed from a forest only in that the latter was a royal possession. When the sovereign parted with his forest, either by deed of gift, or otherwise, to a subject, the possession forfeited its grander title and became a chase. Thus Cranborne was once a forest, when it became vested in King John in right of his wife Isabella, daughter and co-heiress of William, Earl of Gloucester; from whom, it will be remembered, he was divorced on coming to the throne, on the convenient plea of consanguinity. Although divorced from his wife, John, with all the tenacity of a Plantagenet, seems to have held on to her dowry, for he enjoyed the chase for the remainder of his life. Afterwards it reverted to her family, where it remained for the space of two hundred and fifty years, when it again became a royal forest in the reign of Edward IV., and continued an appanage of the Crown until James I. granted it to the Earl of Salisbury by the dog-Latin title, '*totam chaceam, liberam chaceam, et liberam warennam de Cranborne, ac omnia privilegia, jurisdictiones, libertates, in com' Dors', Wilts, et Southampton.*'

The tract of country formerly known, and alluded to even now by the rural folk as 'The Chase,' comprised the north-eastern part of Dorset with portions of Wilts and Hants, and was bounded on the north by the River Avon, and on the south by the Stour, which two streams, inclining ever towards each other, unite and pour themselves into the Channel at Christchurch. The Chase thus embraced an area of 700,000 acres, and had an outer circuit

of one hundred miles called the 'out-bounds,' within which was an inner ring of some twenty-seven miles known as 'in-bounds.' It consisted of eight 'walks,' each presided over by a gentleman ranger, which were termed West-walk, Bursey Stool, Rushmore, Cobley, Stapleford, Vern or Fernditch, Alderholt, and Chettered walks respectively. These walks were cut out into ridings, and well planted with evergreens for browse, or vert, as it was called, for the sustenance of the deer in winter.

The character of the country was free and undulating, wide open downs alternating with thickly planted woodland. Through it ran the great western road from Salisbury to Exeter. This was the only road of any importance: there were tracks across the downs from one village to another; and horse-paths for the convenience of hunters from point to point, the most notable of which, called the Shire-rack, passing through the centre of three walks, Rushmore, Cobley, and Stapleford, divided the counties of Dorset and Wilts.

The sacred beast of chase, for whose benefit this large extent of territory was reserved, was the common fallow deer, the *Cervus dama* of Linnæus and Cuvier, the ordinary denizen of an English deer-park of to-day, though now often crossed with the darker-coloured Spanish or Japanese variety. *Cervus dama* is a small animal, a three-year-old buck standing not more than two feet ten inches at the shoulder, but muscular, and of wondrous strength for his size, while the poise of his spreading antlers, and the glossy hue of his dappled coat as he leaps in short bounds from his ferny lair and faces about to stamp his tiny foot at the intruder, render him no less an object of grace and beauty than his more majestic cousin, the red deer of Exmoor or of North Britain.

Owing to the scarcity of water, and particularly of wet and marshy ground, the red deer, which loves to soil frequently, has never flourished in the Chase: and the last attempt made to establish them there was foiled by the animals betaking themselves almost immediately to the Vale country beneath. Yet it would have been a fair sight to have seen the lordly stags leading their harems down to drink when the evening sun reddened the Tarrant or Neder water; as Byron has so picturesquely portrayed the subject in a single facile couplet of Don Juan:

The branching stag swept down with all his herd,
To quaff a brook which murmured like a bird.

The total head of deer in the last days of the Chase, as stated in the preamble to the Act of disafforestation, was computed at from twelve to twenty thousand.

The proprietor of right of chase over so large and fair a country, containing such a splendid head of game, must have been a much-envied personage; and it is no surprise to learn that his exercise of it was occasionally resented by the landowners, as well as his actual right over various portions of his Chase from time to time disputed.

The chief bone of contention was the 'under' game, as it was called. While the exclusive right of the proprietor of the Chase to every head of deer within its utmost limits was not a thing the boldest durst dispute, the country squires over whose property the right of chase extended naturally claimed a share in the minor game, hares, partridges, pheasants, &c., which fed upon their land, as well for purposes of sport as for the replenishment of their larders. As a privilege this seems to have been liberally accorded, but when it came to be claimed as a right great heart-burnings arose. The first person (as I am informed in a MS. by the Rev. William Chafin, brother of the chief Ranger) who ever 'presumed' to appoint a gamekeeper within the precincts of the Chase was Mr. Doddington, afterwards Lord Melcombe. The presumption of this gentleman led nearly to bloodshed. Mr. George Chafin, head Ranger of the Chase, actually met the new gamekeeper with dogs and gun beating for game in Bursey Stool walk. He seems to have been a man prompt in action, for having also a gun in his hand he shot the three dogs at one shot, as their heads were close together drinking in a small puddle of water in one of the ridings. This high-handed proceeding, we are not surprised to hear, caused a serious rupture between the two gentlemen. Mr. Doddington set out for London the next day, from whence he wrote a challenge to the Ranger to meet him there, and give him satisfaction for the affront, which challenge, the Rev. chronicler informs us, was still extant when he wrote in 1816, 'and a very curious one it is!' Not having seen it, we can give but the sequel to the event, which was less heroic, if more rational, than might have been expected. The Ranger went so far as to purchase a sword in anticipation of the event, which weapon, however, was happily not used, for his friend, Mr. Jacob Bankes, waiting upon Mr. Doddington to arrange time and place, found him more peacefully disposed (his courage having perhaps,

like that of Bob Acres, oozed out at his finger ends); so, instead of fighting, he invited the two gentlemen to dine with him instead; when we are glad to hear they spent a very jovial evening together, and were good and social friends ever after to the end of their lives.

After this episode no more gamekeepers were heard of for many years, until the proprietor of the Chase, Mr. Pitt (subsequently Lord Rivers) was called upon to represent his county in Parliament. Then, taking advantage of his delicate situation (we presume in regard to their suffrages), several gentlemen set up their keepers; and Mr. Pitt being unable at such a time to take severe measures for their suppression, it was erroneously supposed that he waived his claim to the under game.

The chief offender seems to have been one Mr. Harbin, who, in addition to the enormity of killing the under game on his own right and authority, was accused of acting unfairly in preparing a species of pitfall on his estate, into which the deer were enticed by the laying of apple pomace, of which they are very fond, and which they can scent from a long distance. As a practical protest against these encroachments, Lord Rivers organised a great buck-hunt, at which Mr. Doddington (who seems to have come over entirely to the side of authority, possibly with a lively remembrance of the chief Ranger's sword) was present in his coach; Sir William Napier (likewise upon wheels) and other gentlemen also assisting, and there was a formal pulling down of fences. To this arbitrary proceeding Mr. Harbin replied with an action for trespass; but Lord Rivers won his suit, as he did several others, in which from time to time he had either to assert or defend his rights of chase.

As may be imagined, with chase rights so exclusive and so vast a number of deer ranging at large, poaching affrays were of frequent occurrence. These were often of a fatal character. Gangs of deer-stealers infested the forest, and bloody fights took place between them and the keepers. On Chettle Common, in 1780, there was a desperate encounter between seven poachers on the one side, led by a dragoon belonging to a troop quartered in the neighbourhood, and five keepers on the other, in which one of the latter was killed, and the bold dragoon had his hand literally hewn off by a hanger, the truncated member being afterwards buried in Pimperne Churchyard in the presence of a large concourse of spectators, and with (it is stated) military honours! The soldier himself appears

otherwise to have suffered but lightly for his escapade. By a lenity which contrasts strangely with the usual severity of the times, not only was his sentence of transportation commuted to a short term of imprisonment, but when that was over, being unfit through his mutilation to serve his Majesty, he was discharged with a pension, and set up as a game dealer in a street near Lincoln's Inn Fields, where Mr. Chafin met him, and was amazed at the rascal's assurance, for he had the impudence to beseech his custom, and promised to use him well in consideration of the quantity of game he had had from his estate!

The keepers in these conflicts relied upon their quarter-staves and hangers, while the poachers armed themselves with swingels, a species of flail, a weapon of terrible effect in the open. In another terrific affray, however, which occurred a few years later at Rushmore, the keepers by a feint of being worsted retreated, and drew their opponents into a wood, where the swingels were of little use, and in this way gained a clever victory. On this occasion one of the poachers was killed. Both sides alike wore defensive armour—a jack or coat of quilted canvas, and a straw cap shaped like a beehive, well adapted to withstand the severe blows of quarter-staff or swingel.

An illustration of this costume may be seen in the engraving of a quaint old picture called the 'Deer-hunter,' which represents a gentleman-poacher equipped for his favourite sport. It must be understood that in the palmy days of the chase the clandestine sport of deer-hunting was not disdained by men of birth and breeding. If caught they paid the fine, and deemed themselves at liberty to resume their sport as soon as they chose to venture. The most notorious of these amateurs was, we are assured, a gentleman of vast endowments both of mind and body, whose society was courted by many persons of distinction, and who was an adept in the mystery and science of every kind of sport, which he always pursued on foot, having no taste for horsemanship. He was particularly skilled in the 'calling' of quails, using for that purpose a pipe which cleverly imitated the hen bird, therewith luring the cocks to the loss of liberty and final destruction, 'not an uncommon case,' his chronicler quaintly moralises, 'with beings in a much higher sphere and rank in creation.' Besides these accomplishments, this composite person seems to have been fond of music, being president of a musical club which held its meetings at a little inn called 'The Hut' on Salisbury South

Plain ; also of poetry, being particularly apt in his quotations from Milton and 'Hudibras,' which seems to have been his favourite secular poem. Moreover, he was of a very religious turn of mind, on no account going after deer on Sunday until he had performed his religious duties. Undeterred by fines, the little band of gentlemen-poachers, of which he was the leader, pursued their sport until an Act of Parliament was passed making the second offence felony, which put an end to their nocturnal amusement. The portrait of this not uninteresting character represents a person of short stature, yet of aristocratic appearance, notwithstanding his curious panoply of quilted jack and beehive bonnet, with delicate features wearing an expression of singular keenness and energy, and is evidently a good likeness of the eccentric original.

The Chase was also a great harbour for smugglers, its deep woods being well adapted for the concealment of their contraband goods, with the deer-stealers always ready to lend their assistance and aid them to defy authority. Parties of horse-soldiers constantly scoured the Chase in search of them ; and on one occasion, in 1779, coming upon a large gang of fifty men escorting a train of twenty pack-horses bearing a valuable but illicit freight, a regular engagement ensued, in which the dragoons were signally defeated, losing all their horses and arms.

The woods were also valuable to more law-abiding persons for the *pannage* they afforded to the villagers' pigs, large numbers of which fed upon the beech-mast and acorns. In ancient times wild swine appear to have existed here, for in the thirty-third year of Henry VI. a certain Robert Clave was ordered to be distrained upon for killing wild pigs on Iwerne Hill ; while in the following year we regret to learn that no less a person than the vicar of the parish, one Thomas Robe, undismayed by the example of his parishioner, was *attached* for slaying 'four wild pigges with his bow and arrows.'

'What shall he have who killed the deer?' Thirty pounds seems to have been the regular penalty in more modern times. It is recorded that on a certain occasion during a dinner-party at Ebbesborne, whereat several lords and gentlemen of family were present, news was brought in that a buck was feeding in some barley near the house. One of the guests, Colonel Treby, having been followed by a brace of greyhounds, the jovial party sallied forth with these and coursed and killed the deer. Being

caught *flagrante delicto* they voluntarily submitted to a fine of 30*l.*, one moiety to go to the informer, the other, we are more pleased to hear, to the poor of the parish. A gratuity of three guineas was also bestowed upon the keeper, as well as a bottle of claret, which he was required to drink in the company of the gentlemen. That this was no exceptional fine suited to the pockets of the offenders, but the legal penalty, we gather from the instance of a Mr. John Lawes, son of a woolstapler of Alveston, who was haled before the Court and mulcted in the same sum for having roused and killed a deer which was feeding in his father's wheatfield.

To deal with offences against Chase law a 'Wood' or Chase Court was held, and in ancient court rolls mention is made of a prison in which deer-stealers and other offenders were confined in durance vile. From old presentments it would appear that this prison was in pretty frequent use. The courts were held in ancient times beneath a certain tree in Rushmore-walk at about the centre of the Chase. This, called the Larmer Tree, is traditionally the spot where King John was wont to meet when it was his royal pleasure to go a-hunting; and doubtless many a gallant gathering of lords and ladies, courtiers, knights, and gentle dames has assembled in times past beneath its ancient boughs. The tree was a wych-elm; only the rind of it now remains, but within its hollow core a young oak has been planted which is gradually superseding the venerable elm.

The curious term *Larmer* has occasioned much debate. It is popularly supposed to have meant the alarim-tree, or alarm-gate, for there is supposed to have been formerly a gate here leading into the park. But it is more likely a corruption of *Lavermere*, or *Lauermere*, and is so spelt in old maps of the district. The termination *mere* means boundary, and the old elm certainly stands on the bounds of two counties and three parishes. It has also been conjectured that Larmer (*Lauer*) is from the Saxon *Laur* (laurel or bay-tree), wherefore the term would mean the bay-tree boundary; and again, that *Lauer* is simply a corruption or antique spelling of the word Law, and that, as the Chase courts were held beneath the tree, it signifies the Law boundary; which seems the least probable hypothesis of all.

The Larmer Tree stands now in the midst of a beautiful garden, which the owner, General Pitt-Rivers, throws open daily to the public; causing, moreover, on Sundays his private band to play there music of a sacred or refined character, in listening to

which, while they stroll on velvet turf beneath the shade of splendid trees, the country folk may spend a pleasant hour on their day of rest. It is a boon also to the dwellers in neighbouring towns, who frequently avail themselves of the privilege. As an instance of how this privilege is appreciated, we may remark that the gardens were visited by no fewer than 17,000 persons during the last summer, a considerable number for so sparsely populated a district.

The gallant General too, whose name will be familiar to our readers as that of one of our foremost antiquaries and collectors, has anticipated by private example the Sunday opening of art galleries and museums. Near the gardens he has erected a commodious building to contain his varied and interesting collections of curiosities from almost all parts of the world. These are admirably arranged and kept, and so classified as to afford instruction to the humblest visitor. Thus to specimens of carved wood-work from Brittany will be affixed a tiny outlined map of Europe, with that country coloured red; next possibly may be glass-work of Bohemia, or snowshoes from Canada, with the position of those countries indicated in like manner. The same plan is observed in a private menagerie in the home park, where the habitat of every creature is similarly labelled. The educational value of such a plan is obvious; and it is one to be commended to the Zoological Society of Regent's Park, and curators of museums generally.

Here we find relics of a barbaric past in some enormous man-traps found in the Chase. The largest of these, nearly four feet long, and made after the pattern of an ordinary rat-gin, but with a double spring, and armed with tremendous teeth, is a truly frightful engine, and looks capable of holding a Bengal tiger. The possible presence of such a thing lurking with open jaws in the underwood must have lent a zest to poaching which is lacking to that fascinating pursuit in a more humane age.

But the most interesting part of this museum is a room which contains models of the excavations that have been made within the Chase by the learned archæologist, to whom the greater part of it now belongs. These models are made of wood, painted green, with grey and white showing the loam and subsoil of chalk where trenches have been cut or borings made, and are constructed according to scale and the lie of the land, every undulation of the ground being accurately shown. The exact spot where anything of interest, down to such minute objects as a bronze fibula or coin

of Trajan or Antoninus, has been found, is carefully indicated. Here are Romano-British camps and villages, amphitheatres, hut-circles, hypocausts, and ovens of flint, while, wherever a barrow has been opened and human remains found in it, a beautifully executed little model of a skeleton is shown in the exact position in which it was discovered in the grave where it had lain, perhaps, for three thousand years. The actual skulls (in many of which the teeth are still perfect, filling some of us with envy) and other fragments of human framework taken from these barrows are ranged in glass cases round the room, a grisly record of a very long past age.

Hard by the Larmer Tree, and communicating with the gardens by a shady walk, stands King John's house in the village and close to the church of Tollard Royal, so called from the fact that John, while Earl of Gloucester, acquired a knight's fee here through his wife, the Isabella before mentioned. This house is supposed to have been used by the king as a hunting lodge when he visited his property for purposes of sport. John, it appears, was a very energetic person for his times, travelling, as Matthew Paris quaintly observes, *citius quam credi fas est*; and it appears from a table of the royal movements collated from rolls kept in the Tower of London that he was very frequently in this part of the world; so the tradition is probably correct. The old mansion, which is of very plain exterior, but interesting within, was used as a farmhouse for some centuries, but has lately been restored, and furnished with old oak of the seventeenth century. The upstairs rooms are hung with a collection of pictures representing the history of painting from early Egyptian times to the present, among which are some fine paintings, together with some beautiful specimens of old needlework. The largest of the basement rooms the General has, with his customary kindness and thought for his humbler neighbours, appropriated as a reading and recreation room for the village.

Another interesting old house in the Chase is the ancient manor-house of Cranborne, which dates from the time of Athelstan, 980. Here was the great hall of justice, and beneath the dungeon in which the prisoners, condemned by the Chase Court, were confined.

During the sitting of the Court Leet, which was held beneath the Larmer Tree, on the first Monday of September, the lord of the manor, with his steward and retainers, enjoyed the privilege

of hunting a deer. This custom was observed until 1789, when Lord Rivers contested the right, and put an end to what was called the Tollard Hunt. After vindicating his sole right to hunt in the Chase, however, his lordship made it a custom for the Chase hounds to meet here on this occasion and to kill a brace of bucks, which were always presented to Lord Arundel, the lord of the manor, without payment of the usual fee. This annual buck-hunting-day was kept up until Lord Rivers was sent as Ambassador to Turin, when it seems to have fallen into desuetude. After the Court there was a dinner at King John's house.

Great care was taken to preserve the deer, some of the precautions observed at their breeding-time being of a very stringent character. Thus in the 'fence' month, being fifteen days before and after Midsummer-day, a toll of 4*d.* for every waggon and 1*d.* for every pack-horse which passed over Harnham Bridge was exacted, on account of too much traffic disturbing the hinds when dropping their fawns. At such time a pair of antlers was affixed to the bridge to warn wayfarers, upon whom the duty was levied by virtue of a warrant from the lord of the Chase.

The hunting season for bucks commenced on the first day of July, and the last was always killed on the first day of Shroton Fair, September 25. Does might be hunted from St. Martin's-tide, November 11, till Candlemas, February 2. It was one of the orders and instructions set up in the 'outwarde roome' at Rushmore Lodge for all persons to take notice of, that 'noe buck be killed after Hollyrood-day, and noe doe after Candlemas,' which notice-board, containing the ancient rules of the Chase, still hangs in the hall of Rushmore.

A favourite time for buck-hunting seems to have been the evening, which, as Mr. Chafin, who was evidently a practical sportsman, points out, had many advantages. The deer were then upon their legs, and more readily found than when couching in brake or thicket, and as the evening advanced and the dew fell the scent gradually improved, while the cool air enabled both horses and hounds to maintain their wind and go through their work without much fatigue; just the reverse of which, he points out, is the case when hunting late in the morning.

It was a custom in the last century for the regular followers of the Chase buckhounds to meet every season on the 29th of May wearing in their velvet caps a sprig of oak, in loyal memory of the Restoration of King Charles, and to hunt a young male

deer, in order to enter the young hounds and 'stoop' them to their right game, as well as to get the older hounds in wind and condition for the commencement of the season. This practice was termed 'blooding' the hounds, and the young bucks, or 'sores,' so killed were called 'blooding'-deer, their venison being specially esteemed. The meat of a hunted deer was considered infinitely superior to that of one which had been shot or trapped; and the venison of Cranborne Chase was far famed for its fine condition and unrivalled flavour, as well as for the liberality with which it was dispensed.

Other packs of hounds were suffered to hunt in the Chase, provided that they restricted their energies to inferior game, such as hares, foxes, or marten-cats, which latter creatures were, however, at the beginning of this century, already nearly extinct, having been killed off for the value of their skins.

The Chase in former days saw also much hawking, a sport pursued by the local gentry with considerable zest. The wide open downs, sparsely covered with fern and gorse, which alternated with the woodlands, were admirably adapted to this ancient sport. Pheasants and woodcock could be driven from the coverts, hares and partridges ridden up in the open. Nor was there lack of rarer game—the great plover, the dotterel, or even the lordly bustard. Mr. Chafin, in the year 1751, flushed a flock of no fewer than twenty-five of these, observing in his reminiscences that he expected such a number would never again be seen together in England, a prediction which, we should say, has been fulfilled.

The more artificial and questionable sport of cock-fighting, so dear to all classes in the last century, was extensively patronised in Cranborne Chase. There were few gentlemen in this neighbourhood who did not breed and train gamecocks, numbers of which were put out to walk in the Chase; and every village had its cock-pit. Lord Weymouth, who was a great cock-fighter, had a cock at walk at every lodge in the Chase, and paid the keepers well for their care of them; for, besides his fee, every young cock from Longleat was accompanied by a couple of barn-door hens, which remained as the keeper's perquisite when the cock was returned. Nor did the sport lack the countenance of the clergy. The reverend gentleman from whose reminiscences I have already so largely drawn regrets naively that 'in our days of refinement this amusement of cock-fighting hath been exploded, and in a

great measure abandoned, being deemed to be barbarous and cruel; in which respect the writer thinks differently, and believes it to be the least so of any diversions now in vogue.' And this opinion he justifies by the familiar argument that the cocks themselves take the greatest pleasure in their combats.

In addition to the staff of keepers, verderers, and huntsmen, the Chase afforded employment also to a large number of woodmen, the woods being managed according to a regular and unvarying system. They consisted for the most part of a vast number of coppices, situate on different manors, and the property of various owners, but were all subject to the feed of deer after three years' growth, during which period they were enclosed. After about fifteen years these coppices were felled, and the timber sold to dealers, being suitable for light scaffold-poles, rails, palings, gates, &c. Then they were again enclosed with a high wreathed fence against the deer, and in the third autumn these fences were lowered for the deer to leap if they chose, while creep-holes were made for fawns and weaklings. This operation was called 'leaping and creeping.' In the fourth autumn the fences were entirely removed, the material of them made into fagots, and the copses laid open as common feed for all cattle. Besides the deer, a large number of milch-cows were run in the woods, and young kine reared there, most of the hamlets having rights of common in the Chase.

Besides deer-stealing, the walking of gamecocks, and the assisting of smugglers, the poorer inhabitants of the Chase helped to support life by various small industries of less dubious propriety, such as the wreathing of hurdles, shaping of spar-gads for thatching, and the digging of valerian roots (a fashionable drug at that time), which they sold to the chemists, and of which Cranborne Chase was supposed to produce the best in the kingdom. Nutting also was a great industry; the long stretch of woodland, some fourteen miles in length, and on an average one and a half in width, consisting chiefly of hazel, produced an enormous quantity of this popular fruit. This was the poor folks' second harvest. After the fields had been thoroughly 'leased,' or gleaned, not only did the inhabitants take to the woods, but whole families from distant parts would flock to the Chase and camp out for the nutting season, the neighbouring towns, especially the seaports, affording a ready market for their wares. Even when the fierce autumnal gales had stripped the last nuts from the bushes, a few experts

would still supply the market by robbing the squirrels and mice of their winter's store. Such were called 'mouse-hole' nuts, and commanded the highest price, the natural instinct of the poor little creatures, thus cruelly plundered, enabling them to select with unerring accuracy the very best. Truffles also were found in the woods, but these edibles, requiring considerable experience and dogs trained to the quest, were, in more than one way, as 'caviar to the general.'

After many centuries of existence, first as a royal forest and later as I have attempted to portray it, this fine old Chase was doomed to the fate which had already overtaken all or most of the others, viz. disafforestation. The first proposal for its disfranchisement was made so far back as 1791, when certain nobles and gentlemen owning lands therein petitioned Lord Rivers, the last proprietor, in a letter which urged upon him not merely the injury to their own property from the exercise of chase rights, but the great detriment which accrued thereby to the public also. The Chase had been for years, they represented, a nursery for and temptation to profligacy of all kinds; whole villages in or adjacent to it were but nests of deer-stealers, in which children were reared from infancy to theft and pillage, and grew up to be pests of society; and, finally, that it was hostile to good government, the whole country being infested by smugglers, 'these being evils which should not be permitted in any civilised country, as no private property ought to exist so prejudicial to the community at large.'

This was a strong indictment. It was, however, not until nearly forty years later that an Act of Parliament was obtained for the disfranchisement of the Chase. Lord Rivers agreed to receive for himself and his heirs an annual rent of 1,800*l.* charged upon the lands of proprietors within the limits of the Chase, on condition that from the 10th of October, 1830, all his franchises and privileges should cease, determine, and be for ever extinguished, and the Chase thenceforth be disfranchised to all intents and purposes whatsoever.

This catastrophe must have been a severe blow to our good friend Mr. Chafin (supposing him to have lived so long, which for his peace of mind we almost hope he did not), for he says at the conclusion of his reminiscences: 'It is my most sincere hope, and I was about to say my daily prayer, that the evils which I have anticipated will be averted, and that Cranbourn Chase will

remain in a flourishing state until the general dissolution of all things.'

This pious aspiration was not to be fulfilled. Though the air blows sweet as ever over its glorious downs and through its hazel groves; though the immemorial beauty of its woods and glowing gorse-lands remains intact, undesecrated by the builder or contractor, and the cry of hounds is still heard from the banks of the Stour to Harnham Bridge, and from Wardour Castle to Chetterby Wood; yet the antlered monarch of the forest ranges hill and dale no more; all the rights and privileges connected with his preservation and pursuit are gone, and Cranborne Chase, save as a geographical expression, has long ceased to exist. The charm of it happily remains, and I cannot, perhaps, sum up its delights and attraction (as well as its one defect) so adequately as by quoting the opinion of an old keeper, an aged man who had spent his life in the Chase. Whenever he could he attended his parish church, a distance of three miles, where he once heard a sermon in which the parson had spoken of a place that he called Paradise, and which, he said, he could not help listening to, 'for, by the account he gave of it, it seemed to be a desperate pleasant place. And I thought of it when I got home; but when I had considered everything, I made up my mind to believe, and I do now believe, notwithstanding what the parson said, that if there was but a good trout-stream running down Chicken Grove bottom, Fernditch-walk would beat it out and out!'

A PAIR OF LOVERS.

THE lamp was lit. The light it gave forth was by no means proportionate to its smell, and Mrs. Casy had to hold her work close to her eyes to be quite sure that she put the stitches in the right place. The click of her thimble on the needle was audible—it grew slower and more irregular by degrees, for the old woman was tired. She was making the ‘uppers’ of hand-sewn shoes for children. It seemed as if her occupation had gradually generated in her a likeness to the material with which she worked. Her skin was tanned, and of the consistency of leather—dry and wrinkled and tough. She wore a brown stuff dress, much patched, and mended here and there with black thread. Her face was very small and flat. It seemed as if, when Nature had finished making it, she had administered a slap to her yet unhardened handiwork. Mrs. Casy had sparse grey locks which strayed from beneath the black bonnet that covered them almost as if it had been a wig and was as persistently worn. Everything about her seemed to recede, her forehead and her chin had the air of timidly shrinking from the front of her face; the loss of teeth caused her mouth to fall inwards, and her eyes were sunk far in the back of her head. This physiognomy was peculiar, but it was redeemed from ugliness by the exceeding charm of the expression—a charm subtle and indescribable, and arising perhaps from the contradictory mingling of sadness and of happiness about the eyes and mouth, and from that dignity which is sometimes seen in the very poor who are yet independent.

She laid down the little shoe at length with a long-drawn sigh of relief. Her companion, who had been dozing over the small fire, was apparently roused by the sigh.

‘Through, Henerietta?’ he inquired in a small cheerful voice, and with an accent on what he made the second syllable of her name.

‘Yes, my dearie. And I expect you’re pinin’ for your supper, aren’t you?’

‘A little peckish, Henerietta, a little peckish,’ he answered, rubbing his hands. ‘And what might there be?’

He turned in the direction of her voice. He knew just where

she sat though he could not see her, for he had been blind for fifteen years.

Mrs. Casy pushed back her chair and moved towards the little table with a newspaper thrown over it, which served as their larder. She raised the paper and picked up a bloater. She was a very good woman, but, like many who live with the blind and love them, she told occasional lies and justified herself in so doing.

'Bloaters,' she said.

'One apiece, Henerietta?'

'I said "bloaters," didn't I, Thomas?' said Mrs. Casy with easy equivocation as she put the solitary fish on a skewer and brought it over to the little fire, above which it soon began to splutter.

'Nice fleshy ones, Henerietta?'

'Fat as dripping, Thomas, and soft roes to 'em.'

'Soft roes,' said the old man reproachfully. 'Why, you prefers 'em hard, Henerietta.'

'There's only one with *soft* roe,' replied Mrs. Casy quickly, as she went back to the table to cut bread.

Half way she stopped, her face was momentarily distorted by pain, and involuntarily she groaned.

The quick ears of the old man heard her. He inquired immediately:

'What is it, Henerietta? Have you hurt yourself?'

The old woman did not answer for a minute. She wiped her forehead with her apron. Then she said: 'My corn is shooting again.'

'Dearie me,' said her husband. 'Now that is bad. You'll have to have that corn seen to, Henerietta. A pair of uppers 'ld pay for the cutting of it even.'

Mrs. Casy smiled a little sorrowfully. 'There ain't no call,' she said; 'don't you worrit, Thomas.'

'Ah, but I have to worrit,' said the old man. 'You're all I've got, and you're a woman in a thousand, and you're always a-slavin' for me and attendin' to me, and never a grumble; it's nateral I don't like yer to suffer, not even a little. In course there's suffering as the Almighty lays on us, like my eyes as you may say, but corns *could* be prevented. You'll have to try a killer, Henerietta.'

'There, there,' said the old woman soothingly as she brought him his supper. He stretched out his hand, which was white and

clean, and took her hard, toil-darkened one, which he held against his face.

'I can't see you, Hetty, but it seems as if I *could*, and as if you've got a light in your eyes like you had when I was courtin' you. It makes my old heart beat even now when I think how you used to look some of them twilights—and that's forty-six years ago! If anyone had told me then I could ever have loved you more I 'ld have let 'em feel my fists, but I do, Henerietta, I do; you was my sweetheart then, and now you're my wife and my guardian-angel, and my sight and my life—and my sweetheart still. And ain't it nateral I should be oneasy that you should have anythink laid on you, even if 'twas only corns?'

'There, there, Thomas,' said Mrs. Casy again, and she kissed him. Her eyes were full of tears, and she wiped them away as furtively as if he could have seen them.

'Takin' one thing along with another,' continued the old fellow, as he set to work on the bloater, from which she had removed the bones, 'we've had better times than most, Henerietta.' (This remark—the result of his ruminations—was repeated at least once a week, and had been for years.) 'We ain't had no luxuries nor no amusements, but we've been that to one another, and we ain't had children, but that's left us all the more love for each other, and we ain't had no changes. You've been better for me to look at than any country fields, yet I sometimes has a pang that you ain't never seen 'em; I've heard tell they're uncommon green and pretty.'

'I don't regret 'em, Thomas; I can quite imagine 'em, like as if the pavement was chalked green and run into the roads.'

'And the sea, too, where these 'ere bloaters come out of. They're uncommon tasty, Henerietta. I hope yours is a nice and plump one.'

'It's quite a Tichborne,' said Mrs. Casy reassuringly, as she broke off and ate a piece of dry bread.

'And the flowers all a-growin,' and the air all a-smellin' like perfooms I've heerd, as different from Whitechapel as a child's shoe is from a gaiter. Henerietta, you ain't eatin' your supper.'

'Yes, I am, Thomas.' But she had scarcely touched a morsel. She was too tired for one thing, and her face twitched every now and then as if she were in pain. Perhaps there was a little weariness in her voice which betrayed to her old lover the fact that she suffered,

'Have you got your boots on, Henerietta?' he inquired.

'Yes, Thomas.'

'Take 'em off then. There ain't no sense in wearin' boots in the house. I expec' they pinch you, and this damp weather corns always seems to swell. Take 'em off, my dear, and put on my carpets.'

Mrs. Casy immediately bent forward and took off her boots. They were very old and very shabby, and could scarcely have pressed the most sensitive foot.

Shortly after the supper had been finished and cleared away, they prepared for bed. Mrs. Casy undressed her husband, who was singularly helpless even for a blind man; then she washed his hands and his face, and they knelt down side by side and said the Lord's Prayer in their old quavering voices as they had done every night and morning for all the years of their simple lives.

This room had bounded those lives. They had always had the same occupation from their youth upwards, and their married life had been quite uneventful, with no joys except what they had made for each other, and no sorrows except poverty. They had never known actual want, and even when the old man lost his sight it was possible for Mrs. Casy to support them both. Of course it involved self-denial on her part, and the strain on her energies was greater than she realised. She was happy in sacrificing herself. The want of children had never been felt by the man, but in her, though she said nothing, and even realised that childlessness might in their circumstances be a blessing, the mother-instinct was strong, and so it gave her a certain pleasure that her husband should lean upon her and need her, and be as dependent on her as any baby. Only at sixty-six it is not always easy to answer every call upon one's strength and energies.

Long after she had fallen asleep Casy lay wakeful. He was pondering how he could help her. In the morning he said:

'Henerietta, I've been thinking that you take too much exercise. You ain't to go and fetch uppers to-day. I'll get little Bessie from next door to guide me, and then I can bring 'em back for you.'

Mrs. Casy argued the point. 'She enjoyed the fresh air,' she said, 'when she went to fetch work;' but Casy was firm. He declared the only condition on which he would let her go would be that she wore his boots, and as this would necessitate his staying at home she yielded at last with a bad grace.

Casy was in some things as yielding as a child, in others

unreasonably obstinate. When he got the idea that to wear her boots was bad for Mrs. Casy's corn, no argument on her part availed. He believed it was merely her unselfishness which made her willing to go for the work herself, and that therefore he had a right not to let her follow her own desires. Henceforth Mrs. Casy only enjoyed such fresh air as was admitted by her little window. However, as she did not spend time going to and from the warehouse, she got through more work, and was able to spare a halfpenny a week for Bessie as wages for looking after Thomas.

Still, in spite of these precautions, Mrs. Casy's corn did not seem to improve; that is to say, Casy's quick ear would sometimes catch a half-stifled groan. He had never known his wife to suffer before, and his sympathy might possibly have seemed disproportionate to the cause were it not that love justifies such exaggeration, and even makes it beautiful. With few interests, and those all centred in one being, and debarred as he was even from the distraction of labour—for in doing everything for him perhaps his wife had encouraged his helplessness—it was not unnatural that he should brood on this subject. At any rate, he did apparently wonder what could be done, for one evening he said suddenly:

'Henerietta, I've made up my mind to give up my pipe for a spell.'

'Whatever should you do that for?' inquired Mrs. Casy with surprise, for he had never made any secret of the enjoyment he got out of his small weekly allowance of shag.

'I've been a-thinkin',' said he meditatively, 'as it 'ld teach me self-denial a bit. I don't think as we'd oughter be bound to our comforts.'

'There ain't no call,' said she decidedly. 'It ain't as if you was selfish, or bound up in them things.'

'That's so,' replied Casy, 'but still it—it 'ld interest me to see the money accoomolate a bit. If you 'ld give me the pennies I could drop 'em into a box and watch 'em mount up.'

'It seems to me, Thomas,' Mrs. Casy remarked with undue severity (for she scented a motive in this fad of her husband's), 'that you are deloodin' yourself. It ain't self-denial to shove a pleasure on one side and put another in its place. If you 'ld enjoy saving them pennies you might just as well enjoy smokin' the 'bacey.'

This wisdom appeared unanswerable, and Mrs. Casy thought

she had gained the day. But she was mistaken. When she gave Casy his pipe in the evening and he began to smoke it she was not without a thrill of triumph that her common sense had conquered, but the triumph was short-lived. Casy took a few puffs, then he made a grimace and laid down the pipe.

‘Henerietta,’ he said, ‘I’m off ’bacey for a bit.’

‘Ain’t it good?’

‘Oh, I don’t find no fault with it, but I’m off it. I don’t seem to relish it. I expect it don’t agree with me over well, and nature’s a-protestin’. She have that way of doin’ it I’ve heerd. She turns you agin what you’d oughter rejec’. Maybe, when my stomick’s ready for it, I shall fancy it agin.’

So he got his way, and the pennies accumulated, though not very fast. When there were nine of them he took them out of the box and slipped them into his pocket, Mrs. Casy being too used to seeing him play with them to notice what he did.

That day he took back some shoes, and obtained materials for fresh work. He had bidden Bess look out for the chemist’s shop where he had once made inquiries, and he brought back something with him which evidently filled him with great delight. Directly he got in he slipped it into his wife’s hand. It was a bottle of corn-killer!

‘There’s directions,’ he said, ‘on the bottle, so the man explained, but I made him go over ’em again. You applies the mixture at nights with the little brush, and after a bit you soaks your foot in hot water and it ’ll come off sure enough. This ain’t no quack stuff off of a truck, but real genuine. It come out of a chemist’s shop with regulation coloured glasses, so Bess said, and a man to serve you that might have been a gent for the manner of him.’

Mrs. Casy pulled the paper off the bottle with a hand that trembled slightly, and there was a queer, half-amused, half-pathetic look in her eyes as she thanked him, scolding him a little as one might scold a child that has bought a present for oneself with the penny given it for sweetmeats.

‘There ain’t much, I should say, from the size of it,’ said Casy; ‘but when that’s gone we can manage another.’

‘Oh no, no,’ she answered quickly; ‘this ’ll be quite enough—more than enough, Thomas. Don’t never get another bottle.’

That evening, before going to bed, she pulled out the cork and prepared to use the mixture. But her method of procedure

was strangely like that of the old woman who had a cough and being bidden to put a blister on her chest promptly applied it to her box and left it there all night. Mrs. Casy dipped the brush in the mixture and smeared a little on a piece of rag. It gave forth a peculiar pungent unpleasant smell, which the old man sniffed as if it had been the odour of flowers.

‘You’re applyin’ the mixtur’, Henerietta?’

‘Oh yes,’ the old woman answered, holding her nose, ‘I’m applyin’ of it, Thomas.’

‘Do it sting?’

‘Not particular.’

‘Ah, I expect it ’ll do that later on. I count it ’ll do you good from the smell on it; but it ain’t altogether disagreeable neither, considerin’. Do you—do you think it ’ll go off soon, Henerietta?’

‘I should hope so, Thomas,’ Mrs. Casy replied, and she softly dropped the rag into the fire.

This operation was repeated nightly, and, greatly to Casy’s satisfaction, at the end of the week Mrs. Casy pronounced the corn much diminished in size. It must have been entirely a case of faith-healing if so, for not one vestige of the corn-killer had touched Mrs. Casy’s foot.

But if the corn were smaller it had apparently not ceased to pain her. As time went on the look of suffering seemed to have imprinted itself on her face, and often she would lay down her work and wring her hands together in silence. The luxury of groaning was denied her. She still let her husband go with the little girl to fetch the work, and manifested no desire to accompany him. When he was away she would attend to her small household matters, and then it would appear she indulged herself, for she would often cry bitterly and aloud while she went about her duties. Her eyes grew still more sunken, her face had even less of fulness than before, and her skin became, if possible, tougher and more leathery. The blind man, meanwhile, was spared the pang of seeing the change in her, and was as peaceful, as happy, and as contented as ever.

But one day, having been out in the rain, he caught a cold which settled on his chest, and though she wanted some more work she would not let him go for it, but put on her shawl and took the old umbrella, which they fondly imagined was a protection from the rain, and went forth herself, taking the little

shoes under her arm. And the old man sat at home by the fire-side and awaited her return.

All the morning he waited, but she did not come; the fire went out, and the room grew chilly, and hunger beset him. And for the first time she was not there to minister to his wants.

And the afternoon passed away and the dusk came, and though day and night were the same to him yet he knew that it grew late. And still she did not come.

No one came near him. For little Bess, who would have done so, did not know that Mrs. Casy had not come back, and Bess, though she was only eight years old, had to 'mother' three young brothers, and did not have much spare time. She was washing shirts that afternoon, and singing a music-hall song that she had heard in the streets, and the melody of which seemed to her entrancingly lovely.

As time wore on Casy grew more and more restless and uneasy. He longed to go in search of his wife, but did not know how to set about it. And his nervousness seemed to affect him bodily, for he was afraid to walk across the room, though he did so often and often when she was there. He wanted some one to guide his steps, and once or twice he called for Bess in a voice that was too feeble to penetrate even beyond the closed door. At last he stumbled across to his bed and lay there, feebly whimpering and wringing his poor old hands as he muttered: 'Henerietta—come—oh, where are you, Henerietta?' At last, to his great joy, he heard the door opened, and with slow and faltering steps some one stumbled into the room. He sprang up.

'Henerietta!' he cried, 'is that you?'

'Yes,' said a feeble voice. 'It's me, Thomas.'

'Oh,' he said pathetically, 'I thought you was never coming. I'm so tired of waitin'. Where are you, Henerietta? let me feel your hand.'

Some faint rays of moonlight stole into the room. They showed her the figure of her husband, and she crept towards him and put her arms round him. The relief was so great after the strain of anxiety that he began to sob like a child.

'Oh, Henerietta,' he said, 'what have you been a-doin'? It's grown late, and I've wanted you. And I didn't know what might have happened. And I couldn't do nothink. And I'm so helpless without you. What have kep' you, Henerietta?'

She did not answer his question, but contented herself with

soothing and comforting him. His emotion shocked and hurt her for a reason beyond that which he knew, and she was very tender with him.

'I'll tell you presently, my dearie,' she said. 'Let me get a light first and see to the fire. You're hungry, aren't you, and want your supper?'

'I don't want nothink but you. I'm about content now,' he said. But he let her go. He was too tired and exhausted to remonstrate.

Mrs. Casy lit the lamp. By its light the pallor and haggardness of her face were very noticeable, and it was apparent that her dress was torn and muddy. She dragged herself rather than walked between the table and the fire, busying herself with preparations for Casy's comfort. He could tell from her footsteps that she was very weary.

'You're dreadful tired, Henerietta dear,' he said.

'Yes, Thomas, I'm very tired,' said Mrs. Casy, and it was an unusual admission for her to make.

'I wish I could spare you, Henerietta. I'm nothing but a burden,' said the old man dolefully. 'But, oh, I don't know what I should do without you!'

Perhaps her weariness had made her irritable. Never had she spoken to him so crossly or sharply in her life as she did now.

'For Heaven's sake, Thomas,' she said, stamping her foot, 'don't say that agin. I'm sick of hearin' it.'

'Hener-ietta,' he said plaintively, 'it's because I—I love yer so—my dear. I didn't mean to worrit you.'

'Oh God!' said Mrs. Casy with a great sob. And she sank on to a chair and began rocking herself to and fro.

Casy listened for a minute in wonder and dismay. Then he slid off the bed and walked up to her. He got down on his knees by her side and fumbled for her hand.

'You ain't angry with me, Henerietta?'

'Angry, Thomas!' And the two old things, locked in one another's arms, mingled their tears.

'Tell me, Henerietta, tell me what is a-troublin' you.'

'Oh, I want to, Thomas. I've been wantin' to ever so long. And I must afore long. But it don't seem as if you could a-bear it.'

'Have you got to bear it too, my dearie?'

'Oh yes, I've got to. I've had to this long while.'

‘And you ain’t never shared it. Henerietta, you ain’t dealt fairly by me. Joys and sorrows, we said we ’ld never keep ’em from one another, and there ain’t a thought of my heart as has been secret from you. In the Judgment Day there couldn’t be a question asked me but you’d be able to answer for me—what I’ve a-done, and said, and thought—and yet you’ve been a-keepin’ somethin’ back.’

‘I did it for the best, Thomas; I did indeed. But I’ll tell you. I must, I must. And you’ll be brave?’

‘Yes, I’ll be brave, Henerietta,’ he said quaveringly.

‘I’ve deceived you, Thomas, but I did it for the best. About that corn now, Thomas—I never had no corn; I ain’t had one this ten years.’

‘Why, is that all?’ he said with relief; ‘that ain’t so bad after all. Why, bless me, you never had no corn? And the killer now! You didn’t really need no killer? But what made you go and pretend such a thing, Henerietta? And groans! Many’s the time I’ve heerd you groan, and it have gone to my heart like a knife. I couldn’t a-bear to see you suffer. What made you purtend, Henerietta? I don’t blame yer, mind,’ he went on, smoothing her cheek. ‘But what made yer, Henerietta?’

Mrs. Casy clasped him convulsively to her. ‘Oh, I did it to spare you, Thomas.’

‘To spare me—to spare me—Hen—er—ietta! It ain’t—oh, don’t tell me—it’s somethink worse.’

She was silent.

‘Henerietta,’ his voice came like a whisper.

Then there was a long, long silence.

And the fire leapt up merrily and shone on their old despairing faces, and on his sightless eyes which sought hers, and hers too full of tears to see him.

‘It’s that,’ she said at last, speaking slowly, and with long pauses. ‘It have been coming on by degrees, and sometimes it ain’t been much and sometimes it ha’ been cruel, the pain. And when it come upon me sudden I couldn’t help but groan. And the corn was an excuse. And when I’d said it, I stuck to it. And I didn’t never use the killer. And it have got worse and worse, past bearin’ at times. And to-day I walked a bit of the way and it was agony, and then I went farther—and I fell down—and I fainted right away in the road.’

‘Henerietta, you’re a-breakin’ my heart,’

‘And I was took to the hospital——’ She paused, and gathered him closer to her. ‘To the hospital—and they said I ought to stay there—and I wouldn’t because of you—and I cried and went on till they let me come. The doctor he drove me himself, and he wanted to come in, but I wouldn’t let him. I thought you ’ld be afraid. Yes, I drove in a carridge for the fust time, Thomas, and it were that comfortable.’

She tried to be cheerful and divert his thoughts. But he kept her to the point.

‘Well, Henerietta. And the doctor—said——?’

‘He told me, Thomas, as I couldn’t get well. Oh,’ she burst into tears, ‘he says it’s only a very little while—only a very little while, Thomas. And I don’t mind a-goin’, for I suffers so; but what’ll come to you? It’s you I’ve been a-thinkin’ on all the time, and when I come in this evenin’ and see it all—no fire, and you so desolate, it seemed too much. I’ve wanted you to be happy all the time. And it ’ld ha’ been best, may the Lord forgive me, if you’d been took first.’

The old man’s face was as beautiful in its love and dignity as it was touching in its sorrow. ‘Henerietta, you’ve done it for the best,’ he said, ‘and I ain’t worthy, not to touch you. But don’t go blamin’ the Lord, my dear. He knows what He does. If I was to die you might get along, crippled-like, but He knows that when you go I’ll just die too. I couldn’t live without you. Oh, Henerietta,’ he sobbed, ‘we didn’t ought to grumble. Takin’ one thing along with another, we’ve had better times than most, Henerietta.’

MOUNT ETNA.

WHEN I had climbed Vesuvius, peered into its murky mouth, come as near to being suffocated as discretion allows, been grazed on the left shoulder by one of the red-hot cinders courteously cast forth by the demons within the crater, and had all but stepped plump into a ditch of red-hot lava which (for ten francs over and above his fee) my guide had (he said, at the risk of his life) led me to see, then my thoughts turned towards Etna in the south. Alexander craved for more worlds to conquer. We in these days run hard after sensations. As sensations are reckoned, I suppose active volcanoes may still take fair rank.

It is as easy as going to bed to journey from Vesuvius to the vicinity of Etna. Three or four evenings every week a steamer voyages from Naples, and arrives at Messina the next morning. Thence, in three or four hours, you arrive by train at Catania, and your first step in a northerly direction from the railway station or your hotel is the beginning of the ascent.

At the moment, you may see nothing of Etna. Indeed, in winter and spring, the chances are that it will be invisible. But faith and the assurances of your Sicilian friends will convince you that behind yonder vast, unpleasant-looking, cone-shaped cloud, from the base of which you see green lands, woods, and white houses sprawling forth like the treasures of a conjuror's sack, the mountain upon which Epimenides committed suicide towers away towards the empyrean. There is something wondrous impressive about Etna under such conditions. Your fancy exaggerates its difficulties; and your friends, unless they are members of the Italian Alpine Club, exaggerate the difficulties conceived by your imagination. The old terrifying legends are re-decanted for your profit. And under their influence, perhaps, you go to bed and dream of a death of horror upon the mountain top, or of a descent with bleeding and bloated face, like that of Humboldt after his exploits on Chimborazo and Cotopaxi.

In the colder months, Etna may thus be shrouded from the lower world for a week or a fortnight in succession. Even the oldest inhabitant cannot then tell for certain what is happening behind the cloud. The thunder and lightning which at such a

time almost daily entertain the Sicilians of the neighbourhood, are not peculiarly significant. The snow will be piling itself up by feet or yards. Perhaps lava will be flowing here and there from an old or a new outlet. The Casa Inglese (the house of refuge near the summit) will be deep buried. And, without pause, indifferent to all things, the huge crater will be roaring and fuming above the clouds, ever destroying and re-shaping its fearsome boundaries. The oldest inhabitant, being weak in the legs, will think it his bounden duty to warn you against an attempt to climb the mountain in winter. Nor is he singular in this. Looking over the record of visitors in the little inn at Nicolosi (the Zermatt of Sicily), ten miles above Catania, I find, so far back as 1853, the like counsel from a party of Englishmen who had twice failed to get to the summit in January of that year:—

‘The above-mentioned gentlemen strongly advise travellers not to attempt the ascent of the mountain in winter, as it is almost impossible.’

Further, a Frenchman, in July 1854, writes as follows:—

‘The ascent of Etna is one of the most difficult and most fatiguing conceivable, and we (he must have been an editor) think it our duty to warn every traveller who proposes to visit the crater to make a serious estimate of his strength before he sets forth.’

If these combined counsels are not enough to alarm the simple-natured, I do not know what is. But really the Frenchman ought to have been ashamed of himself, or he must have been very frail in the back.

We left Naples by the *Prince Otto*, an indifferent little steamboat, with a screw that worked us like a nutmeg-grater. It was scirocco weather and mid-May. The lava on the flanks of Vesuvius was of the colour of damson juice; the vegetation amid the lava glowed with greenness; and the white houses at the waterside were whiter than ever under the dull sky. The scirocco is certainly an infliction; but it dyes Naples and the mountain with the most entrancing shades of colour. You may be in a state of furious bad temper, or with a racking headache, but you can hardly help muttering that the effect is divine.

Our party of passengers was an uncommon one. The Neapolitan season was approaching its close, and several Sicilian nobles and their families, who had danced through the winter in the

capital of the south, were now returning to their upland home estates for the summer. There were the Barons This and That, and the Marquises So and So, with their respective baronesses and marchionesses, sons and daughters, manservants and maidservants, horses and carriages and dogs. The Countess Z—— was accompanied by her Monkey, a small plaintive animal dressed in scarlet, and behung with bells. I quite expected the little brute would be invited to take soup with the rest of us.

The conversation on board was as hippic as at Newmarket. For the lords of Sicily have great taste in horses, and nothing is too fiery for them. One baron vaunted the muscles of his son's legs as a wonder of his province. He defied his companions to produce the horse that could upset his boy. And the boy himself meanwhile cracked nuts and drank his wine with an elated look, as if he were well aware he could not possibly excel in better possessions than muscular legs. I talked with him later, when he had had enough nuts. He was as honest-minded and engaging a youth as ever gave himself heart and soul to the pleasures of a country life. And he confessed, with enthusiasm, that, when he was a man, one of the first of his ambitions to be fulfilled should be a visit to England, to see the Derby run. He told me of the fifty steeds in his father's baronial stables, all thoroughbred, and all tractable in his young hands, and much else. You should have seen the flush of joy in his face when I complimented him upon the muscles of his legs.

Besides the Sicilians, we included an English lady in a Tam-O-Shanter, an English clergyman, and an English soldier's wife with three little children journeying for Malta. My countrywoman very gravely put the captain of the vessel (a red-faced piece of pomp) to the question, because the soldier's family were to have no covering for their heads in the night.

'But, madam,' protested the mariner, 'they do not pay for sleeping accommodation. They are deck passengers.'

'Oh, but it is a shameful thing—shameful!' she insisted.

The clergyman was the instigator of the revolt, but his ignorance of Italian kept him in the background. He stated his arguments in English. The lady kneaded them up with enough Italian to render them comprehensible, and blushed from stress of philanthropy and her conspicuousness.

To the majority of us, it was somewhat curious. For my part, I would willingly have given the woman and her babes my bed

and cabin for the privilege of couching in cooler air. It is not so easy to define a hardship as my compatriot supposed. The baronesses and marchionesses were much interested in the colloquy until they learnt its import. Then they exchanged delicate shrugs of the shoulder. It was evident that they said in their hearts, 'How eccentric these English are! and what a guy the girl is with her healthy red face and that grotesque thing upon her head!'

The dawn of the following day found us between those little classical bugbears, Scylla and Charybdis. I wonder what the ancients would have thought of the race of water between Strömoe and Osteroe of the Faroes. The stream there is a good deal stronger than this in the Sicilian channel. Moreover, it has less passage room. But poor old Homer would have been at his wits' end to rise to the occasion. He exhausted himself in the Straits of Messina over the production of this kind of thing:—

Fierce to the right tremendous Scylla roars,
Charybdis on the left the flood devours.
Thrice swallow'd in her womb subsides the sea,
Deep, deep as hell; and thrice she spouts away
From her black bellowing gulphs disgorged on high
Waves after waves, that dash against the sky.

With us, however, Scylla was on the left, and very pretty is the little Calabrian town of Scylla which perches on the headland attached to the fateful rock. The *Prince Otto* did not deign to go out of her course to avoid the perils that menaced her. Even Brydone, who in 1770 voyaged hither in the *Charming Molly*, and wrote of Sicily as if it were a land unknown to Englishmen, could not find it in him to grow magniloquent upon the subject. He thought the locality had degenerated since the time of the 'Odyssey.' A redskin of the Fraser River would run between Scylla and Charybdis with his eyes shut, and light his pipe, without trepidation, midway in the stream.

Messina, I am thankful to say, does not demand to be described. It is a place of marine smells and much traffic. The former are, however, mitigated by the breezes that blow up and down the channel, or obliquely over it. There had been a catch of sword-fish off the coast the evening before. The fish market was adorned with their large carcasses, swords and all, fast being shorn away into cutlets. If only a shoal of tunny could have had a peep at the scene, they would surely have laughed to behold the figure thus presented by their terror-inspiring comrades of

the sea. Some of them had been sold almost to the tip of their long noses, which alone awaited a purchaser. In truth, for hungry mortals as well as those who are particular what they eat, there are few things more palatable than a swordfish steak. You may consume it broiled or boiled. It is like Severn salmon, with a difference.

Notwithstanding Messina's commercial reputation, I found some score of citizens and their wives and many children intent in idle admiration of the movements of a bicyclist at exercise before the cathedral porch. The performer went round and round in the limited space until he was giddy. The people cried 'Wonderful!'

But the bicyclist and all his tricks were not nearly so wonderful as the beauty of the land south of Messina, on the way to Etna. The graces of our own dear country are vastly too methodical and of the Dutch-like pattern. Even with our mountains, it is too much as if Nature's operatives had been bidden to smooth down their rugosities with a plane. There is hardly a touch of the fantastic in all the land. Here, however, one looks to the right up valley after valley of a grandeur that makes one catch one's breath. Crag upon crag to the clouds! A castle in ruins here and there upon a pinnacle that seems quite out of human reach! Verdure everywhere; the green of young vines and the grain below; of mountain oaks above; white stony riverbeds broadening towards the sea, with sparkling threads of water in them! The level land ablaze with the brilliant pink and scarlet of geraniums grown to trees! Square mile upon mile of orchards of orange and lemon trees, sweet with blossom! And the quiet blue sea rippling upon the yellow sand! We northerners cannot but exult in this smiling land.

It was afternoon when I arrived at Catania, and straightway set off for Etna. I had talked with a German doctor in the train, and half won him to join me in the ascent. He said 'Yes,' and for an hour held to his word. But when Catania was nigh, and he saw the utter blackness of the distant heavens, he cried off, and went in search of dinner. He said that perchance anon the mood might recur to him, and urge him towards Nicolosi ere nightfall. But such vacillation is not to my taste, and I parted from him in the station as if for eternity. A doctor who coquets with a mountain would stop in the midst of an amputation, and say: 'I think, after all, you may get on very well with your diseased limb, my dear patient.'

Will the day ever come, I wonder, when volcanoes may be bridled like a horse, and mayors and corporations laugh lustily at the idea of peril to their towns from such assailants as lava and volcanic dust? Let the Royal Society solve the question. It does not, however, seem so very improbable. A municipal umbrella a mile or two in diameter could surely be constructed by some ingenious machinist. Even a river of molten lava flowing at the rate of a mile an hour (a very uncommon pace) ought not to be undivertible. And if the fumes of sulphur and the closeness of the air oppress the city, of what use are experimental chemists if they cannot devise counter atmospheric currents of the necessary kind?

But perhaps it were best to go promptly to the root of the matter. In the interest of ordinary human beings (who do not climb mountains, and who dislike those of the world's shows which are suggestive of danger), I suppose sooner or later all the volcanoes of the globe are likely to be tapped, their fires extinguished, and their pride humbled. Depend upon it, this is their eventual fate. We have rid the world of its wild beasts, save the few that are retained for sporting purposes. The more formidable of Nature's inventions that threaten our tranquillity will be the next to go. A tunnel, five, or ten, or fifty miles, more or less, from the sea into the bowels of the mountain, and the work is done! In the contest between our oceans and hydraulics, on the one hand, and the earth's volcanoes on the other, be they ever so tall, and of ever so old an establishment, there can be no real doubt as to the issue. And when we have put out all the volcanoes, our posterity will have as flat and peaceful a life as the most inane of them could wish for.

Catania provokes such thoughts as these. It has been destroyed, wholly or in part, I know not how many times. The present city is built upon a foundation of lava dozens of feet thick, mingled with which are the remains of its predecessors, each in their particular strata, or welded into a curious kind of concrete. Thus, a Catanian might bore under his house in quest of his ancestors two hundred years ago, or two thousand. And yet the inhabitants of to-day are not afraid. Neither Etna nor the record of past earthquakes has prevented them from raising a city of massy stone buildings that would not have discredited Florence in the days when her nobles built fortresses for palaces. Catania has nearly 90,000 inhabitants, and without much effort

one may prophesy that the next great seismic disturbance in Sicily will slay half of them. But what is that to political economy? If land is dear in the suburbs, the city must compress instead of dispersing itself with due regard for the security of human life. And so we have its sledge-hammer 'palazzi' of several storeys high, with space for several families upon each storey. A single coping stone from one of these 'palazzi' would suffice to wreck the nest of an entire family. And an earthquake of average mischievousness will crush or stifle to death every inmate in every 'palazzo.'

Yet, though the Catanians seem so lamentably reckless, it is impossible not to admire their city. The long Etna Street in its midst is thoroughly impressive. It runs due north, straight as a pine trunk, until it seems thin as a hair. And it enfildes to perfection the huge body of Etna, which, thirty miles distant, looks like an irregular natural wall of the city, bisected by a chimney. One could fancy that the street was built for the volcano's convenience, so that its lava on the southern side might drain thence at its ease into the sea. But it is hardly wide enough to serve such a purpose in reality. The stream of 1669, which mounted the south-west walls of the city, and ran far into the sea (constructing gratis the present harbour), was four miles wide in places. It seemed likely to expunge the Catania of that day. But the people flourished the veil of St. Agatha before it ere it approached the walls, and the consequence was a bifurcation which saved them.

It was towards Nicolosi, the site of this worst of Etna's modern eruptions, that I trudged up the long Strada Etnea, knapsack upon shoulder. Little enough of the mountain was visible. An occasional bellow of thunder echoed from its cloud down to the plain. And for five or ten minutes only the gloom round about its head broke to show an apparition of black crags and snow-fields that seemed to have no connection with our earth. The prospect for the morrow was far from cheering. On the way I took the refreshment of a coffee-ice in a shop of the city, and there learned that for a week there had been wild doings on the mountain. There was talk of nothing but constant thunderstorms and snow beyond Nicolosi. The market price of fresh snow in Catania (with the thermometer at 85°) was but three halfpence the kilo. Verily, the German doctor seemed to have abundant reason upon his side.

Nothing interested me more in the course of this ten-mile walk than the carts of the peasantry. They are the gayest of creations. And not content to adorn them with a border of fret-work that would have graced his parlour, the Sicilian agriculturist paints romances and scriptural episodes upon their panels. The designs are a little rough, but so bold ! One is transported at a glance to the realms of chivalry sung with such heartiness by Ariosto. The cart may be condemned to carry pig-wash or something equally base ; but, externally, it breathes of a gallant youth with a mandoline, sighing, with instrument and eye, towards a maiden at a turret window. In a fragmentary mode, I should think I saw depicted on one panel or another all the wondrous adventures of Rinaldo and Angelica. The Chevalier d'Anglante was there, transfixing six of his armoured foes upon his trusty lance, 'as if they were figures of paste.' And innumerable other knights were to be seen riding at full speed, I know not where, each with a long-haired damsel tight clasped in his arms, or hung across his pommel like a regimental cloak.

But, since I am upon the subject of long hair, let me give a measure of fame to an old woman whom I met on the way in Mascalucia. Even as the Catanian carts were more remarkable than the balmy air and luxuriance of the happy fertile land they traversed, so the dame outdid the carts. She was about sixty, hooded, and in a blue gown ; and she carried a hoar beard upon her chin that I could have grasped in both my fists, and yet failed to cover. I never saw woman so liberally endowed. Had it not been an indelicate thing to do, I would certainly have stopped and asked her as to her habits, diet, and antecedents. But I detest the modern custom of interviewing, and so I passed her by unwinkingly. The Emperor Julian, who wrote against beards in general, would have made a fine paragraph out of this old creature. Yet she bore herself loftily, as if she were quite unconscious that Nature had played her a sad trick.

Soon after I had passed this androgynous entity, Nicolosi came into view. It is a village of hardly 2,000 inhabitants, and stands some 2,300 feet above the sea. Close to the west of it is the double-peaked crater of Monte Rosso, or the Red Mountain, which swelled up like a blister in 1669, and poured a torrent of lava down upon Catania. It is one of the prettiest of the 'figli' of Etna—so the scores of the like volcanic boils which beset the long slopes of the great mountain are called. The blush of

ferruginous crimson on its summit explains its name, though in truth it is, on the whole, more black than red, and when the vines which cover it are in leaf, green rather than red or black. Monte Rosso is only about 750 feet higher than Nicolosi, but its dimpled head was in the clouds when I approached the village. Indeed, the portents were all as bad as could be. There was a drizzle of rain, a pitchiness upon Etna, and a continuous rumble of thunder. But I never saw a lava bed look more imposing than the inky stream by the village in the atmospheric gloom. Its blackness was quite appalling. This torrent broke forth so lately as 1885, and, in the expressive words of a native, 'made all Nicolosi weep.' The lava of 1669, below the village, had, however, already put on its first verdure. Bushes of 'ginestra,' or mountain broom, were thick upon it, in the full strength of blossom. This blaze of bright yellow upon the jetty black and grey, under a dull sky, was very piquant; and the perfume, with that of the honeysuckle, which wove from bush to bush, clung with a cloying sweetness to the humid air. A restrained twittering of birds from this plantation of Nature's setting was the only sound that strove against Etna's growls over the scene of desolation.

Let not the traveller look to find in Nicolosi a stately hotel of the Swiss type, with electric bells, polyglot waiters, and music in the evening. Some day there will no doubt be such, but the day has not yet come. An earnest-faced small man came towards me on the skirts of the village, welcomed me genially with both his hands, and, with instinctive prescience, consoled me by making light of the mountain's humour, while he led me towards his inn. This was a single-storey white house by a church in scaffolding; and hung against its southern wall, to catch the pilgrim's eye, it bore an excruciating picture of Etna, and mountaineers nearly as large as the mountain. A legend upon the sign-board told how his was the only legitimate Etna hotel in Nicolosi, and that it was under the ægis of the Italian Alpine Club. But I would not be thought to decry the little inn. Mazzagaglia, the landlord, is an authority on all things Etnean. For generations the Mazzagaglia family have been guides in Nicolosi. It was, for example, a Mazzagaglia who, near a hundred years ago, accompanied the Abbé Spallanzani in his ascent. The present landlord for thirty years went up and down the mountain, and he has but one chief regret—that his wife has not borne him a small Mazzagaglia to pass on the family tradition. He is a man of kindly heart and locally omniscient. Proud indeed is he of the two well-

kept volumes containing the names and lucubrations of visitors to Nicolosi during the last three-quarters of a century, and lively is the reading in the books. But he does not understand English, or he would have been less eager to point at hazard to a recent page, upon which, with coarse untruthfulness, the following judgment appeared :—‘The master of this inn is a thief.’

Briefly, clean sheets, a dry bed, excellent wine from Monte Rosso, and early fruit are the characteristics of the Locanda Etna in Nicolosi. When Brydone travelled in Sicily, the authorities at Messina gave him half a dozen bandits to act as guides. These worthy fellows threatened with instant death the Sicilian landlord who overcharged the tourists, so that it was possible for eleven men and ten horses to dine heartily for half a guinea. If Mazzagaglia of the Locanda Etna is not quite as moderate in his charges as the brigands would have had him be, his impositions are by no means gross enough to justify his assassination.

We arranged the preliminaries of the expedition while I dined. The guide in chief of the district (a very civil gentleman) gave me no rose-coloured auguries. We drank our wine with the thunder louder than ever about the village, and the bluish lightning flashing fast upon our windows. But the rain had stopped, which was much. And so the landlord and his wife went forth and killed a fowl, of the ‘thin, thoughtful, canting’ kind, cooked beefsteaks, made soup, twisted pinches of salt, and put old wine in new bottles in preparation for the dawn.

In fact, however, we had to start long before the dawn. Mazzagaglia called me at the painful hour of three, and by the trampling outside I knew, ere I left my bed, that the mules were at the door. In the night a change had come over the sky. The thunder-clouds had disappeared, and the heavens were dazzling with stars. With professional enthusiasm, Mazzagaglia must needs drag me out into the chilly air in my shirt sleeves, and there and then pilot me to a point whence Etna could be seen afar. It was as winsome a spectacle as I ever looked upon. The broad pale slopes soaring from our level, the intense white of the snow in the high cleared air, and the long puff of ashen smoke at the summit, drifting towards the stars! A bright half moon hung over Monte Rosso, to illumine our steps. All was very quiet. Even the most presumptuous of the Nicolosi cocks did not venture yet to proclaim the morn.

There is an agreeable sense of mystery about a ride by moonlight, especially if the moon be but half a moon. One’s

surroundings are then like the mere shapes of things. They affect none of the properties of substances. If you put out your hand to touch them, it is almost a surprise to feel resistance. You cannot say whither you are going, for the ground is transfigured by the prevalent gleam of witchery. It is like a sea flecked with phantasmal islets. The very mountain cones on either hand are not real; they will of a surety vanish with the stars. And there is no small fear that Etna itself, its snow, its steam, its hidden fires, and all, will fade into barren nothingness with the crowing of the cock. So it seemed to me while we were meandering up the still streets of Nicolosi, and when we had begun to plough through the deep black sand at the base of Monte Rosso. It was a hard opening of the day for the hapless animals, and they at any rate had no chance of being beguiled by the spectral unreality of the world. But the Etna mules are large sturdy fellows, and thus early in the morn I for one had no thought of compassion to offer them. We stumbled along through the night, cloaked to the chin, breathing the pure moist air, and now and again gaping like crocodiles. Conversation at such an hour is an impossible thing. We awaited the first glimmer of the dawn to put us on a footing of thorough communicability.

We were in the greenest of young woods, in their spring panoply, and had been afoot an hour or more, when the day began to break upon us. Not a single marplot cloud was to be seen. We had but just crossed the black ruin of 1885, beneath which lay vineyards and pastures of Nicolosi worth two million francs. The stream had divided above the village, which it embraced like a forked stick. Small marvel that the villagers did not stay to witness the havoc that was wrought upon their land. When report reached them of the hourly advance of the fire, they began to go. Sleep was not to be thought of. And when the fluid was within gunshot of the houses, they forsook their homes. A few old men and some soldiers were alone left in the place. By-and-by the others returned. There was much natural wailing over the loss of land; but they have already scratched a respectable highway across their rugged quarry, and confidence has sprung anew in their hearts. This devastating Behemoth of 1885 is not yet dead however. Even in the moonshine we saw the smoke rise from it where we trod and elsewhere; and a few hours later we passed near to the crater (Monte Gemellaro) whence it had

issued, and marked the vapour eddying out of its black mouth. It is not easy to determine when the lava of a flow has become thoroughly congealed. Much depends on the composition of the lava, much also on the profundity of the stream. The surface soon hardens, so that it is possible, with brisk feet, to walk across it while yet it is in motion. But underneath it retains its heat, and even its red glow, for months and years after its emission. Dolomieu, indeed, declared that the lava Dell' Arso, in Ischia, was alive in the last century. But this is probably the *ne plus ultra* of assertion on the subject, since the lava in question dates from the year 1302.

In the meantime the dawn stole round about us through the trees, the dewy bracken, and the fragrant clumps of honeysuckle upon the hawthorn. The thrushes among the chestnuts began to carol, the black and red humps of ash (hundreds of feet high) above the trees to the right and left stood more and more solid. We no longer groped in uncertainty. The mules could gaze in futile discontent at the dark dust through which they had to tread, and in which at every footfall they sank six or seven inches. When at length the sunlight put a rosy glow upon Etna's steam, there was no doubting the token. A moment later, and the lower snow was turned to coral, the smoke took a tint of gold, and anon the mountain flanks were all of coral and gold by turns. Finally, the leaves of our chestnut-trees were dipped in the light, and the day was fully born. It was time to say 'Good-morning,' and look at each other. But, spite of the colour and sparkle of this cheerful pageant, it was biting cold. And all the three of us were conspicuous rather for red pinched noses than aught more prepossessing, or for sprightliness of spirit. A sunset is ever better than a sunrise, because the former does not, like the latter, mock the beholder. Evening succeeds an active day, and at the sun's departure there is no offensive contrast between the warm hues of the sky and the body's warmth. A man would get little pleasure by gazing from the lone north pole upon the exuberant vegetation and bustle of life in the tropics. It seems a parallel case.

For the ensuing three hours we ascended methodically and without a halt. The track was almost too matter of fact. There was nothing of perpendicularity here to win the affections of an Alpinist. For colour, however, give me these Etnean flanks in defiance of the world. It was not only the woods, with their

lively undergrowth of grass and flowers, but the very soil beneath our feet. At one time this was of a sooty hue, then it changed to a strawberry-red, and after a while to grey. The rain of the day before had riven this glamorous path into miniature ravines. We trod daintily on the edge of precipices, five feet or more sheer. A careless step of my guide's mule buried both man and beast eighteen inches deep at the base of one of these abysses; and the higher we rose the brighter were the swelling hills which dotted the slopes. One was a velvety brown, another purple, a third a glittering bronze, and a fourth the colour of cochineal. They were of this century and the last, and even earlier. The veterans among them were distinguished by the tall trees they had generated; whereas the youngsters had only a delicate green down upon the lip, and the most recent of them held their sheeny ashes unadulterate. As we rode beyond and above them, we looked below into their swart mouths, concave like saucers.

All this time Etna was as visible as ourselves, but it seemed mightily remote. There were points of rock about it free from snow, else all was white, save the topmost cone, whence the smoke rose thickly without pause. The Serra del Solfizio, to the east of the great crater, was especially engaging. Its black and white were well diversified, and we knew that on its farther side it fell perpendicular to the Valle del Bove. Ah! if only the clouds would hold off until I had looked once into this stupendous glen! And so we pressed on, that we might keep the whiphand over the day.

But it was not to be. When they had plodded for four hours over the most fatiguing of materials, and never rested a leg, the mules flagged. There is a cottage in the chestnut-wood to the left (the Casa del Bosco), the last habitation towards Etna, and here they are wont to dally and indulge in water-drinking. But to-day they were disappointed in the matter, and so they sulked. Their pace degraded to a dreary saunter, and in this they mulishly persisted, notwithstanding the expostulations of their master, who had them in keeping. And while they thus dragged themselves on through ash and over the lava heaps, the first clouds of the day began to brew before us. At the outset it was thin mist rather than clouds. But the mist embodied only too speedily, and joined with the smoke of the cone. Then a current of air came to take charge of the new creations. It hurtled them hither and thither, fattening them with the exercise. And thus by nine o'clock all the heavens within a wide radius of the summit

were populous with vapours. They did not instantly blot out all things. They played hide and seek with the mountain for fully half an hour. But after that it was a bad business.

To soothe the hurt feelings of the mules we now sat, and prematurely broke our fast upon a spot of weak greenery amid a waste of inclined mud heaps. The air was singularly unappetising, I know not why. We had lavish prospects below us. The sun shone broadly upon the lower world, and blanched villages, blue sea, dark woods, and the nearer humps of ash were all declared. We were here about 6,000 feet over Catania. Already the clouds were within a thousand feet of our heads. According to Herschel, Etna's cone is 10,772 feet above the sea. It was conjectured, therefore, that about 4,000 feet of cloud were above us, unless the mountain top pierced the bulk, and stood unsullied in the blue.

When the mules had eaten pansies and star-grass for half an hour (there was nothing in the world for them to drink), we got them to work again. But the region of gloom and absolute sterility towards which we bore was not a whit more to their liking. The snow lay in grimed heaps wherever there was a dell among the ash. This fine ash by-and-by changed to a nasty tenacious black mud, which the wet of the clouds and the percolations from the snow rendered particularly disagreeable. We floundered tediously, and the mules were hard set for breath. It was therefore a relief, after a while, to get to the edge of a waste of untrodden snow, and to dismount, to try the final issue with the mountain on foot. The Serra del Solfizio was here close to our right. Intermittently its bold peaks appeared through the clouds; and before us, to the left, the huge white cone of Monte Frumento (the loftiest and greatest of the 'figli') was for the moment fully displayed. Etna's summit lay obliquely to the rear of Monte Frumento. By Antonio's reckoning, a good two hours' work had yet to be wrought.

With nothing beautiful within the range of our vision (unless hysterical damp clouds and smutty snow a foot deep be things of beauty), we ascended slowly until the gracious dome of a house stood through the fog in front of us. This was the Casa Inglese, or English house of refuge. It is as like a small church of the Greek faith as it well could be. I should expect to see in the hollow of its dome a big coarse picture of Christ, done in mosaic by a Byzantine. But as we were without the key, this shelter

was not for us. It is a most substantial building for such a site: a compact little fortress of lava-blocks closely morticed, shuttered and iron-banded windows, gutters and a roof of lead—all girt by a strong wall. A man could not be more securely housed against the elements at a height of 9,603 feet above the sea.

That the shelter should be called the Casa Inglese is a fine though not unmerited compliment for our stout-calved nation. The original skeleton of the thing was set up by one of the Gemellaro family in 1804 (the same family after whom the volcano of 1885 was christened). But the English colony in Sicily at that time were not satisfied with Gemellaro's little hut. They instituted a subscription among themselves, and the Casa Inglese is the outcome of it. The Italian nation have now added an observatory to the shelter, and the result is the present imposing edifice. Unless we protest, I fear the designation of the Observatory is likely in a few years to supersede the name of Casa Inglese. In truth, however, the latter title is one of courtesy only, for the Britons who built the house formally bequeathed it to Gemellaro, by whom it was subsequently presented to Italy.

It is indicative of our predominant energy that two such peaks as Etna and Tenerife (both in foreign lands) should have a Casa Inglese. But however it may be with the Peak of Tenerife, we have lost the precedence at Etna. The Germans have beaten us. They come hither in the spring, in the guise of scientific investigators, and ascend the mountain with hammers and tin boxes, and other more mysterious tools of science. I suppose they have written more pamphlets about Etna than all the other nations of Europe put together. The visitor's book in Nicolosi is an incontestable witness against us. Fifty years ago, nine-tenths of the visitors were English. Nowadays, the proportion is a fourth or a fifth. No doubt, however, this apparent neglect is due rather to the stronger attraction of our colonies and the United States than to a decay of national energy.

The Casa is almost sybaritic in the luxury of its appointments. The Italian Alpine Club are not content to store in it such bare essentials as beds and fuel and straw; they go down the gamut of domestic furniture even to knives and forks and tumblers. A score of travellers may thus get cosy lodging for the night. Under certain circumstances, one could think of a temporary residence here as very desirable. As an air-cure house it might do well, the sulphur fumes, of which there is such unstinted supply, being, of course, of further medicinal value. And as a retreat

from the madding crowd it could hardly be surpassed. Mazzagaglia told me of a certain Englishman who, forty-five years ago, did in fact make this use of it. He was brother to a lord, and 'pazzo in testa' (rather soft). From June to September of one year he lived up here, with no companion except a violin, which he played divinely. Mazzagaglia, then a boy, was wont every other day to ascend from Nicolosi with fresh vegetables and meat for the recluse's consumption. But this was not quite enough for the Englishman's stomach. Once a fortnight, therefore, he descended to the village and ate a very heavy dinner, after which he returned to Etna. His health all the while was excellent. I think there are Englishmen (not necessarily 'weak in the head') who could sympathise with this 'brother to a lord' in his passion for the mountain air and solitude. But fancy a man playing the violin on the edge of Etna's crater, with the furnace roar in his ears! It is a companion scene to that of Epimenides about to take his immortal header, and an effective picture of the sad results of combined genius, a tendency to craziness, and a mind perverted by Lord Byron.

Etna's cone springs almost from the walls of the Casa. The smell of sulphur hereabouts rekindles expectation. It is time to begin to keep watch and ward over one's head, for

Etna roars with dreadful ruins nigh,
Now hurls a bursting cloud of cinders high,
Involved in smoky whirlwinds to the sky;
With loud dislosion to the starry frame,
Shoots fiery globes and furious floods of flame.

So sang Poet Laureate Warton in his day, under Homeric inspiration.

But, added to these ordinary perils of the spot, Antonio and I, in the course of our final climb, had to face the prospect of elemental strife. Heaven's artillery was already in the field, and the gunners were trying their guns. Though clearly a lad of pluck, Antonio did not like the look-out. He wanted to be up and down as quickly as possible, ere the series of noonday storms, which had become a routine experience for Nicolosi, burst upon us from their very source. The cone was at a stiffish angle, and, from the looseness of its material, hard to grapple with. There was further much fume of sulphur, and the clouds rode upon our backs. Above us we could see little, but that little was eminently suggestive. A whirl of energetic vapour seethed vertically through the common clouds, and when the wind (which did not

know its own mind) dashed it downwards in our direction, we had much ado to bear it. Worse still, however, were the inflamed rocks, which fell now and again with an ominous thud indifferently to the right or left of us, above us or below. Etna's roar was inaudible, but it was still as in Warton's time—

Her shattered entrails wide the mountain throws.

I have ever been esteemed thick in the head, but these neat round bombshells were of a size and kind to crack the thickest of skulls like a hammer upon a nut. I imagine Antonio accounted his head no safer than my own, for he was mortally brisk in his movements to leeward whenever the chance offered. With every stimulant to exertion in these the last moments of our climb, in spite of the toil of it, we soon got up the cone. At 11.20 we came suddenly upon a level, and saw the smoke boiling up from below. This was the summit.

How I wish I were here in a position to compel dithyrambic words from my laggard brain, in praise of the sublime and expansive view that met our eyes! Would that I could sincerely echo the eloquence of Brydone, who here averred 'that in proportion as we are raised above the habitations of men, all low and vulgar sentiments are left behind; and that the soul, approaching the ethereal regions, shakes off its earthly affections, and already acquires something of their celestial purity.' Would even that I could enter into the spirit of Spallanzani, who, after all his fatigues, at length 'exalted in a kind of rapture,' here sat down on the edge of the crater, and remained for two hours. We were not so fortunate as Brydone and Spallanzani; though let it be said that Spallanzani accuses Brydone of failing to reach the crater, and of indulging in his flights of rhetoric from an inferior standpoint; and let it be said further, that the Abbé makes the most of all the perils he incurred, so that one is fain to think him the hero of science he limns himself.

Verily, Antonio and I had no opportunity for tranquil realisation of the glories of our situation. In the first place, we could see nothing but the dark impending edge of the crater at our feet. A pace further, and we should have gone the way of Epimenides. Moreover, we had not well taken our bearings. The wind was against us, so that the sulphur on the summit blew in our teeth as if to stifle us. Spallanzani, in the like predicament, for a while lost his senses, and this on a day the most propitious. Had we tarried, our fate might have been more tragic. For though

the sulphur was bad, the bombardment from the depths was worse. At any instant a missile might have taken us. To put the climax of discomfort upon us, there came an admonitory thunder-clap fit to wake the dead, and at the same moment a storm of snow and hail buffeted us hard. We bent our heads before this variety of ill-treatment, and struggled towards a more sheltered quarter with all speed.

I am much grieved that it was quite impossible to measure the crater, even by perambulating its boundaries. Antonio professed amazement at the changes which had taken place since his last ascent, about a year back. The gulf yawned as of yore, but an internal ridge of cinders and mud divided it into two parts. The crater thus assumed the appearance of two craters, and each seemed to vie with the other in its outthrow of mud and stones, and in the height to which it could lift its smoke. This latter, notwithstanding the wind, rose in agitated volutes five or six hundred feet above our heads. But the upper air would have none of it, and so it was beat back upon us, and rushed down the slopes of the cone, mingling with the hail and the snow.

Our footing, as we strove to and fro on the brink, and tried in vain to see through the noisome smoke, was very unpleasant. We were on the mud outcast that very morning, and so but a quarter congealed. It clogged our boots like new snow, and there was, or seemed to be, some danger that it might fail to support our weight, and let us down Heaven knows whither. Under these conditions it was unwise to stand long in one spot, though, to be sure, the turmoil of the elements and the cold (thermometer at 38° , with a fierce wind) was another effectual bar to this. There was such a shrieking of the storm fiend, and such a merciless whipping of hail and snow upon our cheeks, and such a stifling malodour of sulphur, that, while we stumbled along, we pivoted round and round, in vain attempt at self-protection. How I envied Spallanzani his chance of sitting calm for two hours, note-book in hand, watching the crater's operations at his feet! His artist has drawn a curious and even a thrilling picture of him in this position. His two guides are seen amusing themselves by throwing stones into the crater, while he is depicted upon his knees recording his observations. Very different, too, was the crater in his day. It is shown as a tall cone, so little out of the perpendicular that it rather resembles a chimney-stack, and constructed by nature after the mode called cyclopic. The Abbé had

to clamber up this wall of immense rocks, brought somewhat neatly into a state of coherence by the exusion from within of a convenient mortar of molten lava. I should much like to have seen the party descend from their aerial perch.

Since Spallanzani's time, the pinnacle he climbed has fallen in. Other pinnacles have been upraised, and they also have had their day. It is this periodical change in the configuration of Etna's crater that makes every ascent more or less a journey of discovery. The crater that this year seems about two miles in circuit may, next year, by the mountain's activity in the generation of new material, be reduced to one mile. And, the year after, the very banks which have been built up to diminish it may all collapse, and the gulf may widen to a mile in diameter.

Our view of Sicily from the summit is soon described. We saw none of it except the ground we trod upon.

Half an hour by the crater was enough for us. Antonio began to prate about men who had been done to death upon Etna, with so earnest a tone that I felt he feared the like fate for us. It really did not seem impossible; for, ere the half-hour had expired, we were in the thick of a tempestuous hurly-burly. I have never heard thunder to outshout Etna's. It was also sufficiently grim to have the gloom of blinding snow and mist which enveloped us cloven every minute by a jagged flash, which was as much below as above us, and seemed at times to strike from our very midst.

The snow did not cease until we were beneath the snow-line. We were knee-deep ere we had done with it. But I think the snow was preferable to the torrents of rain which poured upon us for all the rest of the day, until we were again by Nicolosi. The woods were lovely under the influence of all this moisture. There were actually runlets of water in the volcanic dust; and when we touched the zone of vines, we found the vineyards in the midst of glittering pools. The lower we descended, the higher was Antonio's enthusiasm. It was a charming rain—worth a mint of money to Nicolosi. What did it matter if we were like half-drowned cats?

As for the thunder, it sounded weaker and weaker as we progressed, so that by the time we were in the village we heard but the mere echo of the claps which, by the crater, almost made one's hair stand on end.

The Hotel Etna received us again at five o'clock in the evening. Our work had taken us thirteen unresting hours.

THE COUNTESS RADNA.

BY W. E. NORRIS,

AUTHOR OF 'MATRIMONY,' 'HEAPS OF MONEY,' ETC.

CHAPTER XIII.

CE QUE FEMME VEUT.

LOVERS' quarrels, as all the world knows, have from time immemorial discharged the beneficent task of moral thunderstorms, and it was probably as desirable as it was inevitable that some few further struggles for mastery should take place between Douglas Colborne and his wife—if not upon the question of Phyllis's dowry, upon some other which would answer the purpose equally well. But, setting aside his natural masculine horror of rows and his political preoccupations, he had a very good reason for being reluctant to cross her at this time, if he could possibly help doing so. The doctor said that, in view of an event which was not so very far distant, the Countess ought not to be crossed; he also said that she ought not to be overfatigued; and how to carry out the latter injunction without disobeying the former became a problem of more pressing importance to Douglas than that of reconciling his sister's acceptance of a little fortune with his own notions of what may and what may not be accepted from a wealthy sister-in-law.

For the Countess, unfortunately, liked London society, while she hated the idea of being sent down to Stoke Leighton before the end of the session. Nor was this prospect made at all more attractive for her by Mrs. Colborne's kind offer to accompany her thither and take care of her until Douglas should obtain release from his Parliamentary labours. She ended, however, after a great deal of discussion and persuasion, by assenting to the proposed arrangement—partly because she really felt too ill and weary to keep up her present manner of life, and partly, it is to be feared, because, like most mortals who are out of health and out of spirits, she was not unwilling to be furnished with the luxury of a grievance. To Stoke Leighton, therefore, she went, attended by Mrs. Colborne and the girls, while Douglas continued for the

time being to inhabit a corner of the mansion in Carlton House Terrace.

Now, it may be conceded that if separation from her husband was a very fair sort of grievance, as grievances go, the company of her mother-in-law and her sisters-in-law was an even more substantial one. She did not dislike any of them personally, but she did not care much about them individually or collectively, and they bored her not a little with their kindness, their exaggerated precautions for her comfort and their unending flow of conversation upon topics which had not the faintest interest for her. She wished them all well, only she wished them out of sight and hearing; and she looked forward with some apprehension to the probability of their spending the entire summer in their former home. They certainly talked as though such were their intention. They had no country-house of their own, and the chances were that Mr. Colborne's resources did not admit of their hiring one; added to which, their present quarters suited them admirably, being within easy reach of Windsor, where Colonel Percy was quartered. Although nothing had been said about it, there seemed to be a tacit understanding that the wedding, which was to take place in the autumn, would be solemnised at the parish church and that the bride would be married from her brother's house. That sort of thing, the Countess sometimes reflected in moments of ill-temper, is scarcely the reward that one is entitled to expect for having shown oneself amiable as well as generous.

Colonel Percy, who was always coming over to luncheon, was a rather dull man; Phyllis, though grateful and affectionate, was reserved; the pair did not, after all, seem to be passionately in love with one another. It was impossible to feel any great interest in them, and not easy even to participate in the excitement which attended the purchase of the *trousseau*. The Countess was, perhaps, too rich to care as much as women generally do about *chiffons*; at any rate, she did not care about them, preferring to leave such matters to her dressmakers, her tailors and her maids. More than once she had vague thoughts of decamping at a moment's notice—so as to avoid argument—and telegraphing to her husband to join her somewhere on the Continent. More than once, too, she caught herself sighing for Bickenbach, who at least understood her and her moods, though she *was* such an old goose.

Matters mended a little, but only a little, when worn-out legislators were dismissed for their holidays and when Douglas arrived, rejoicing at the prospect of once more donning his cricketing-flannels. It is true that the Countess altogether failed to understand the fun of cricket, even after she had witnessed a match and after all its details had been fully and laboriously explained to her; it is true that to hear cricket, and scarcely anything else, talked about from morning to night is a little trying to anybody who does not play the game; still she was glad to have her husband back, and glad also that he had brought Frank Innes with him. Frank Innes was the one of Douglas's relations whom she liked by far the best; Frank was not wholly given up to sports and pastimes; he could talk, for instance, about music, and was just now very willing to do so, having recently discovered, to his great delight, that he possessed a pure tenor voice, which he was cultivating with great assiduity. Frank was one of those young men who are always ready to bestow immense pains upon any kind of work which is not compulsory.

'I'll tell you what it is,' he said one day to the Countess, with whom he was now upon terms of the most confidential intimacy; 'I shouldn't wonder a bit if I were to turn out a second Sims Reeves some fine morning. I was talking last week to a professional chap, and he told me that the quality of my voice was pretty nearly perfect. To sing a couple of songs at a hundred pounds apiece on Tuesdays and Thursdays during the season, and to have the rest of one's time free for innocent diversions, would be about good enough, wouldn't it?'

'I am not sure that it would be good for you to have too much free time, or that all your diversions would be innocent,' she answered, laughing; 'but if Heaven has blessed you with a talent or a faculty of any kind, you certainly ought to utilise it. Unhappily for me, Heaven has seen fit to deny me exceptional talents and faculties.'

'That's quite as it should be. Having granted you exceptional beauty and an exceptionally big fortune and the very best husband in the world, Heaven has done more than enough for you, in my humble opinion. I used to think Miss Rowley the luckiest woman of my acquaintance; but you can walk right away from her. Of course she isn't in the same class with you as far as beauty goes, and I don't suppose she is a quarter as rich; moreover, she hasn't had the good fortune to marry Douglas.'

'Well, no, she hasn't married him, but she doesn't allow that trifling omission to deter her from treating him as if he belonged to her. She was here the other day, and she couldn't have given him more orders or instructions if she had been his sole constituent. I suppose, living where I do, it would be an abominable heresy to say openly that I don't like Miss Rowley; but, as I am sure you won't betray me, I may confess in strict confidence to you that she is rather too well pleased with herself to please me.'

'Oh, you would like her if you knew her better,' answered Frank. 'I daresay she may seem to you to be a bit dictatorial, but she doesn't mean to be, and she can't very well help seeming so; because, after all, she does rule the roast hereabouts, you know. Besides, all things considered, I should think you could afford to be generous to her.'

That was just what the Countess was not so certain about. No doubt, other things being equal, she could (as Frank Innes might have expressed it) have given Peggy Rowley points and a beating in respect to beauty and fortune; but the inequality of other things was more manifest to her than it was to her juvenile confidant. She was convinced, and perhaps rightly convinced, that nothing but the accident of having spent an Easter holiday in Paris had prevented Douglas from espousing his well-to-do neighbour; she could not but be aware that Peggy would have proved a more suitable helpmeet for him than she herself could ever be; and, although her trust in him was not shaken, she did not absolutely trust Miss Rowley. It stood to reason that Miss Rowley must be a disappointed woman, and one does not need to be a sorceress in order to divine what course a disappointed woman is likely to pursue under certain circumstances.

Now, it came to pass that, in accordance with custom and precedent, Miss Rowley gave a garden-party at this time, and that the Countess Radna, amongst others, honoured the Swinford Manor festivities with her presence. The honour was duly appreciated and the Countess was duly admired; but English people when in the country are apt to be too shy or too lazy to conduct themselves exactly as they would do in London drawing-rooms, and thus it often happens that strangers find their welcome a somewhat chilling one. The Countess, after the first few minutes, was disagreeably conscious of being left out in the cold. Two or three dowagers sat down beside her and, with an obvious effort, pumped

up commonplaces from the recesses of their minds for her benefit; but these ladies were so silly and so tedious that she ruthlessly scared them away, and her hostess's middle-aged duenna, who hovered near her, looking anxious and apprehensive, was a poor substitute for the knot of young people who had congregated round Douglas and were chattering and laughing together like so many happy children. The Countess would have liked to join the group, but did not choose to do so uninvited, and she appeared to have been forgotten both by her husband and by Peggy Rowley, who at that moment was impressing emphatically upon him the paramount importance of his making a big score at the approaching county cricket-match.

'I don't grumble at you for not having electrified the House by your eloquence yet,' the Countess heard her say; 'you are right to bide your time. But it is as clear as daylight that you must do *something* to win popular esteem; and if you were to get bowled first ball, I should tremble for your chances at the general election—which may come any day, mind you.'

The listener overheard several more speeches of this half-serious, half-jocular description, and was not best pleased with any of them. It must be acknowledged that if she had been pleased, or even if she had not been slightly provoked, she would have been a rather abnormal sort of wife. The absurd part of it (that, at least, was what she felt) was that all these good people who were turning their backs upon her were so essentially her inferiors. Anywhere on earth, except in England, they would have been bowing down before her, while she would have been exerting herself with her accustomed graciousness and affability to set them at their ease. The experience through which she was passing had the advantage of novelty; but it had the disadvantage of being novel in quite the wrong direction. To be tired of being a spoilt child is probably the destiny of all Fortune's spoilt children; but it does not follow that their longing for a little change is at all likely to be gratified by neglect, and the half-hour of undisturbed meditation which was accorded to the Countess Radna convinced her that change of another kind was what she required.

'Do you know what I am going to do?' she said abruptly to her husband, as he was driving her along the road towards Stoke Leighton in a mail phaeton, his mother and sisters following in the family barouche. 'I am going home to Hungary. Hungary isn't so very much home, you may say. Well, I grant you that;

still, when one is reduced to a choice of evils, one naturally selects the less. I wouldn't for the world say that there is anything intrinsically evil about this rural abode of yours, or about Mrs. Colborne, or Phyllis, or Loo, or Miss Rowley, or cricket-matches or garden-parties; only it so happens that all these people and things present themselves to me in an unmistakably evil light for the moment. Set it down to my state of health, if you like; I shall not contradict you.'

'But, my dear Hélène,' objected Douglas, whose countenance had fallen considerably during the above outburst, 'it is precisely your state of health which puts such a journey out of the question for the present. I am sorry, though I am not surprised, at your disliking English country life, and later in the year I will take you to Hungary with pleasure if you still wish it, but I don't see how the thing could possibly be done now—I don't, really.'

'I do. It can be done by the simple expedient of sending off a few telegrams and taking a few railway tickets. There are doctors in Vienna as well as in London; there is one of the name of Schott, who is thoroughly acquainted with my constitution and will be only too pleased to obey any summons from me. Nothing that I know of prevents our leaving England the day after to-morrow—unless, indeed, it be the necessity of your acquiring political distinction by running to and fro seventy or eighty times between one bunch of little sticks and another.'

Douglas laughed a little uneasily. 'Oh, of course the cricket doesn't matter,' said he; 'but there's Phyllis's wedding, you know. If you mean, as I suppose you do, that we are to domicile ourselves in Hungary for the next three months or so, we shouldn't be back in time for that.'

'I should sincerely regret our enforced absence, but I imagine that the bride and bridegroom would contrive to get married quite comfortably without us. In a word, we are not wanted here, and one of us doesn't want to be here; the only question is whether the other is unselfish enough to tear himself away. Don't trouble to tell me that I am unreasonable and capricious; all that is understood and admitted. But when every admission has been made, the fact still remains that I am at the end of my patience. If you won't take flight with me, I shall have to take flight alone.'

Douglas Colborne was blessed with a very fairly even temper

and could control himself as well as most men ; but, of course, he did think his wife capricious and unreasonable, though he refrained from saying so. He conjectured that she must have been put out by something which had occurred at the garden-party, and he judged it best not to question her, but merely to beg that she would take another twenty-four hours for consideration.

‘If you are still in the same mind this time to-morrow, and if the doctor doesn’t absolutely forbid it, we will do as you wish,’ he said. ‘Only I must confess that I shall be very much astonished if the doctor doesn’t forbid it.’

The Countess rejoined that she was not inclined to acknowledge herself the slave of any doctor ; whereupon her husband made a slight grimace, touched up the horses with his whip and held his tongue.

In the course of the evening he consulted his mother, who lifted up her hands and her voice in dismay and was for betaking herself to dear *Hélène’s* bedroom immediately and reasoning with her ; but this Douglas somewhat peremptorily forbade, remarking that the case was not one in which counsels of reason were likely to be of much avail. ‘What I can’t quite make up my mind about,’ he added, ‘is whether I ought to say Yes or No ; and it looks to me rather as if I should have to say Yes.’

‘Oh, but you *can’t*!’ remonstrated Mrs. Colborne. ‘After having made all your arrangements for the summer and autumn, it would be too ridiculous, besides being most imprudent and foolish, to upset them in obedience to a mere whim, which will probably pass in a day or two. Pray, don’t bother yourself any more, but leave *Hélène* to me. You might allow me credit for having had some experience of these things and for knowing a little more about them than you can.’

That sounded plausible, and Douglas withdrew a veto which, as he could not but be aware, had small chance of being respected, whether he withdrew or maintained it ; but on the ensuing morning the Countess’s maids received instructions to pack up, and soon after breakfast his mother sought him out with a crestfallen mien and a confession of defeat.

‘Dear *Hélène* is most kind and thoughtful,’ the good lady said ; ‘she begs us not to disturb ourselves in any way on her account, and hopes, as I am sure you do too, that we shall remain here until after the wedding, just as if we had you with us. But she won’t hear of abandoning this journey ; she won’t even listen

to any discussion of the subject. I don't quite know how H  l  ne manages it,' added Mrs. Colborne candidly, 'but she has a way of making one understand that, when her mind is made up, it would be almost impertinent to argue with her. Perhaps, after all, the risk won't be so very great. However, we shall see what the doctor says.'

It was at all events evident that Mrs. Colborne's matronly alarm and maternal solicitude had been lulled to rest by that unscrupulous bribe of free board and lodging for the remainder of the summer months; and Douglas, perceiving this, was amused in spite of his annoyance. He was naturally rather annoyed at being dragged off to Hungary without rhyme or reason just as the prospect of a period of holiday-making had seemed to lie open to him; but he was not altogether blind to the petty vexations from which his wife was determined to escape, nor did he think that he would be justified in opposing her fancies, so long as the doctor's consent could be obtained to the fulfilment of them.

The local practitioner, it need scarcely be said, sanctioned everything that he was told to sanction, merely recommending certain precautions which would have been taken without his orders, and the Countess scored a victory which was not much the less a victory because it was only won upon sufferance. A strong man can afford, and is sometimes right, to yield a point against his better judgment; but he may be perfectly certain that, whenever he does this, his strength will be accounted as weakness by the other sex.

The first stage of the journey undertaken by Douglas Colborne and his wife landed them no farther on their way than their own house in London. The Countess, who was in high good humour, was willing to submit to all trifling restrictions, and did not in the least mind spending a week over a transit which might have been accomplished in a third of that time: provided that she was delivered from Mrs. Colborne and the girls and Peggy Rowley, the rest was a matter of indifference to her—or, at least, that was what she imagined.

'I am truly sorry for you,' she said in a half-mocking tone to her husband, as they sat down to dinner together on the first evening, 'but what would you have? *Ce que femme veut, Dieu veut*; and, to tell you the truth, those excellent relations and friends of yours were beginning to get upon my nerves in an

insupportable manner. I really couldn't have endured them another day.'

She might have crowed over him a little less defiantly, he thought; but he kept his temper and held his tongue. Unluckily, that did not satisfy her. She wanted whatever it is (the present narrator does not know what it is, and therefore will not attempt to say) that women want when they insist upon provoking unnecessary squabbles; she was resolved to make him angry; she laughed at the docility with which he had allowed himself to be placed in political leading-strings by a lady whose manners and appearance she satirised freely; she inquired whether he had obtained that lady's permission to absent himself from home, and at length she irritated him into retorting:

'Upon my word, *Hélène*, you would do better to imitate *Peggy Rowley* in some respects than to sneer at her. She may not be your style, but that doesn't prevent her from being, and well deserving to be, one of the most popular women in England. At any rate, there is nothing small or shabby about her; and I'm quite sure that if she hated you as much as you seem to hate her, she wouldn't say nasty things about you behind your back.'

Well, the Countess had gained her point, and, as so frequently happens in such cases, had got rather more than she had bargained for or desired. *Douglas* was not a satisfactory man to quarrel with; anger, which was not a transient emotion with him, made him cool instead of hot, and so it came to pass that the ensuing encounter proved a more serious one than the aggressor had intended it to be. Upon the details of it there is no need to dwell. Most of us, unhappily, know only too well that, whether we remain cool or boil over under provocation, we usually, in the thick of the strife, say things which we afterwards regret; and if *Douglas* sinned less than his wife in this respect, the chances are that he was not a great deal less aggravating. Be that as it may, she retired to her bedroom at length in tears, and without having achieved the hoped-for reconciliation, while he betook himself to his study, to wonder moodily, over a cigar, whether, in marrying as he had done, he had not, perhaps, undertaken a task somewhat too complicated for the average, straightforward Briton to cope with.

He had smoked a second and a third cigar before an agitated tap at his door was followed by the entrance of the Countess's maid, who came to announce that her mistress had been taken

very ill indeed, and that she thought a doctor ought to be summoned. That this was a step which must be taken without delay Douglas perceived as soon as he had run upstairs, two steps at a time; but that medical skill is of little avail after Nature has caught the bit between her teeth, he was destined to be made aware in the small hours of the morning, when a son was born to him who only survived his birth by a few minutes.

'It is very unfortunate, Mr. Colborne,' said the experienced personage who imparted these sad tidings to him; 'but we may well be thankful that things are no worse. I am glad to be able to tell you that, so far as can be seen at present, the Countess Radna's life is not in danger. Some danger, of course, there is, and must be; only there might have been a great deal more. You cannot have forgotten my warning you that absolute rest and immunity from worry of any kind would be found essential in her case.'

It was thus that Douglas, like many a comparatively innocent man before him, was humbled to the dust by a sense of inexcusable guilt.

CHAPTER XIV.

CUTTING THE KNOT.

SMALL things, whether they be joys or sorrows, pass out of sight and are forgotten as soon as they come into rivalry with great ones, and Douglas Colborne had no need to reproach himself for a catastrophe which his wife never dreamt of attributing even remotely to his sternness. Nevertheless, he did reproach himself, his penitence being in no wise diminished by the evident sincerity with which, when she was able to talk again, she assured him that she was unconscious of having anything to forgive. It is true that he had some reason for doubting whether he had been really and truly forgiven; because it is difficult for a man to understand why the death of an infant, who can scarcely be said to have ever lived, should be the cause for more than a transient emotion of grief, and because the Countess, although she recovered her health as rapidly as could have been expected, did not recover her spirits. In certain respects one of the sexes must always remain a mystery to the other; perhaps also the honest inability

of men to enter into the feelings of women is answerable for a large proportion of those estrangements regarding which it is customary for bystanders to affirm that there is no fault on either side.

Such an estrangement now sprang up gradually between Douglas and his wife, and was more or less recognised and deplored by both of them—by him, it may be, rather more than by her. They did not fall out again—it would probably have been much better for them if they had—they were perfectly good friends, and did their best to consult one another's comfort and convenience, but each became conscious of a loss of sympathy which was not very likely to be regained. In a word, they had witnessed the inevitable extinction of romantic love, while that kind of love which ought always to be ready to take its place at the right moment had somehow failed to put in an appearance. Douglas, as men, when confronted with this universal experience, invariably do, shut his eyes to the truth; the Countess, as women (perhaps in this instance alone) generally do, looked it in the face and, as they very seldom do, shrugged her shoulders and smiled at it.

When she was well enough to travel he took her to her ancestral domain in Hungary. She expressed a desire to carry out the interrupted programme, and of course he asked nothing better than to comply with any wish of hers which seemed to hold out a prospect of restoring her vanished cheerfulness. But Hungary did not produce that effect upon her; nor did the shooting-parties and festivities which were organised for his benefit exhilarate him. Something was wrong which certainly could not be set right by means of novel experiences, or sport, or by the splendid hospitality of neighbouring magnates, who, notwithstanding their hospitality, made it manifest, either designedly or because they could not help themselves, that the Countess Radna's husband was not in their eyes the Countess Radna's equal. The Right Honourable Douglas Colborne—to give him the full style and title to which he may lay claim to-day—will always retain a genuine liking and admiration for the Hungarian nobility, who, he says, are as good sportsmen and as good fellows as if they had been born Englishmen; but it is most improbable that he will ever care to renew his acquaintanceship with them in their native land.

He bade them farewell, with no very profound sentiments of

regret, in the month of November, by which time his wife had signified to him that she also had had enough of her compatriots. She might have added, but did not add, that she had had enough of his into the bargain; she might have told him, but did not tell him, that she was longing to pass the winter in some sunny Southern resort and dreaded the idea of a return to Stoke Leighton. It was no fault of his that he was unable to divine sentiments so completely at variance with his own; nor, on the other hand, was it any fault of hers that her husband's country residence, when its doors were once more thrown open to admit her, struck her as almost unendurably dull, dreary and forlorn. Some consolation, to be sure, might be derived from the thought that its dulness and dreariness were no longer enlivened by the presence of Mrs. Colborne and her daughters; for one of these ladies was now safely married, while the other two were as safely domiciled in their London home. Still the outlook in that cold, grey, cheerless weather was far from being a joyous one, and the Countess's heart sank as she endeavoured to steel herself to the duty of facing it.

'Oh, no; I am not going to hunt again,' she said, in reply to an early suggestion on Douglas's part; 'but don't let that prevent you from following the hounds. In fact, I can't see what alternative is open to you, except suicide.'

It was to speeches of that description that Douglas could find no adequate rejoinder. Did she mean that she wanted him to expatriate himself, or was it that she cherished a smouldering, but unquenchable feeling of resentment against him for having once addressed her roughly at a critical moment, and that, do what he would, she would never be able to live happily with him again? Either way, silence and patience seemed the safest remedies to trust to, since he had already expressed and given evidence of his repentance, and since he could not turn his back upon England, even to please her. So he took to hunting three days a week, and often forgot his troubles in the joy of riding straight, as well as risking his neck every now and again.

He was thus employed one afternoon, and the Countess was, as usual, absolutely unemployed, when who should drive up to the door to pay a neighbourly call but Miss Margaret Rowley. She was admitted, no instructions to turn away visitors having been given to the butler, and she was received with somewhat less of formality than she had anticipated on hearing that the

Countess Radna was at home. The Countess was, in truth, so unspeakably bored that she could not for the life of her help welcoming a lady who, in her opinion, was rather too ready to count as a right upon being welcomed. Besides, there were points as to which she felt a certain degree of curiosity which Miss Rowley was presumably in a position to allay; consequently, she did not trouble herself to beat about the bush, but, after she had rung the bell and ordered tea, began:

‘You have known my husband from his infancy, I believe. I wish you would be kind enough to tell me candidly what you think of him.’

Miss Rowley stared for a moment and then laughed. ‘It is lucky,’ she remarked, ‘that I think nothing but good of him; for if I happened to think him a scoundrel or a fool, I could hardly say so, could I?’

‘But, as it would be impossible for you to think him either the one or the other, my question isn’t an unanswerable one. Of course, I shouldn’t have put it if it had been.’

‘All the same I don’t know that I can answer it,’ said Peggy, after a short pause; ‘one doesn’t care to tell all the thoughts that one has about one’s friends. Speaking broadly, I should say that I think Douglas Colborne an excellent specimen of the average English gentleman. He is excellent, I mean, because he has all the average English gentleman’s good qualities and a considerably larger share of brains. Will that do?’

‘Yes, if you will not be induced to say more. But it would be more interesting if you were to take into account, as you naturally must when you think about him at all, that he is an English gentleman who has placed himself by his marriage in a very unusual situation. What do you suppose he is going to make out of that situation?’

‘Doesn’t that depend at least as much upon you as upon him?’ asked Peggy in return. ‘I am sure that he will always behave as a gentleman should; but that is really the limit of my knowledge upon the subject. I know no more than that he has married a foreigner, who is also a great lady in her own country, and that in such cases there is probably need for a good deal of giving and taking on both sides. But it is Douglas’s nature to give rather than to take; so it should be easy to live with him.’

‘Ah, that is really interesting! So a person who is more willing to give than to take is your idea of an easy person to live

with? I should have said just the contrary; but that only shows how useful it is to compare notes with other people. Douglas, as you are evidently aware, will take nothing; I wonder how much he would give, supposing that he were driven into a corner.'

The entrance of the butler, attended by a couple of satellites, bearing a tea-table, a kettle and other paraphernalia, gave Miss Rowley time to consider what response it behoved her to make to the above challenge. When she and her entertainer were once more left to themselves she said:

'I should be sorry to drive him into a corner; the most pacific of Englishmen will show fight if he is treated in that way. I haven't the slightest idea of what it is that you are alluding to; only, as you ask me what I think of a man whom I have known intimately all my life, I needn't hesitate to say that I think he should be taken seriously. It would be a hazardous sort of experiment, which he wouldn't understand, to make extravagant demands upon him merely for the sake of discovering whether he would yield to them or not.'

'If, for example, I were to beg him to take me out of this dismal climate to the Riviera for the rest of the winter?'

'Oh, I have no doubt he would do that if you asked him; only he would have to return in the beginning of February, when Parliament reassembles, you know. Do you really want to go abroad for the winter?'

'I think I do; but I am sure that, if I went to Cannes or Nice, I should not want to return in the beginning of February. It seems to be a most inconvenient thing to be a member of the British Parliament, and I wish Douglas would resign his membership. But perhaps such a sacrifice would be too heavy a one to require of him?'

'It certainly would, unless he is a much greater fool than I take him for,' answered Peggy bluntly. 'No man, except an absolute fool, would think of sacrificing his whole career for the sake of giving his wife a few months of amusement; and supposing that any sane man did make such a fool of himself, his wife would be the very first person to despise him.'

'*C'est selon,*' observed the Countess, with a smile; 'for my own part, I should never despise a man who was capable of making a great sacrifice. Some men, you know, love things, while others—but, of course, not a great many—love people. I was curious to discover in which class you would place my husband, and I find

that your impression is much the same as mine. Still, there can be no telling until he has been put to the test.'

'I can't believe,' exclaimed Peggy, with rather more warmth, perhaps, than the occasion warranted, 'that you would be so selfish as to test him in that way.'

'Oh, I am selfish enough for anything. But we will talk about something else now, for I see that I am displeasing you; and if I have a right to try my husband's patience I have none at all to try yours. Thank you for answering my question so explicitly.'

Peggy was not conscious of having done anything of the sort, but she was conscious of having expressed herself with somewhat uncalled-for vehemence; and, although she was a perfect-tempered woman, she would have liked very well, at that moment, to box her hostess's ears. That being a method of showing disapproval which is precluded by modern usages, she took refuge in distant, good-humoured politeness for the next five minutes, after which she got up and said good-bye.

After her departure the Countess sat for a long time gazing idly at the fire. She had succeeded to some extent in discomfiting Miss Rowley, but she was not particularly elated by that easy triumph, and the remembrance of a few observations which had fallen from Peggy depressed her. 'A man who may always be relied upon to behave like a gentleman, and who will always do what is sensible, and respectable and ordinary,' she murmured—'oh, that describes him to the life, no doubt, and it is a thousand pities that two people who were made for each other should have been separated by a person who seems to have been made only for herself. If he loved me, or if my baby had lived——'

Her eyes suddenly filled with tears; but she was not much given to weeping, and she brushed them impatiently away. 'After all,' she exclaimed, as she started up from her chair, 'it is not a question of a tragedy—who could construct a tragedy out of such materials? The real danger is that it may degenerate into a farce, and that he and I may agree to grow old and fat together quite comfortably, upon the mutual understanding that nothing in this world is of genuine consequence except material well-being and political mediocrity.'

Now, there really was not, and in her heart she must have known that there was not, much risk of such a descent into bathos as that; yet she chose to take measures for guarding against it.

When Douglas returned, she favoured him with an account of the above recorded conversation, which distressed him but did not provoke him to anger.

'I dare say Peggy doesn't always choose her words as carefully as she might,' he remarked; 'still, she seems to have been substantially in the right. It is true that, if you insisted upon it, I would apply for the Chiltern Hundreds, and I suppose it is equally true that you won't insist upon it.'

'Perfectly true,' answered the Countess rather wearily; 'and that is just why you and I find ourselves in a *cul-de-sac*. What does one do when one can neither advance nor stand still? Doesn't one retrace one's steps?'

'Only that is impossible, *Hélène*.'

'Not so impossible as you think, perhaps. Shall I tell you of two things which are really impossible? One of them is that I should ever become reconciled to the kind of existence which I am now leading, and the other is that you should ever become reconciled to any different kind of existence. It is a great pity, but there is no help for it; so, instead of casting stones at one another, we will go and dress for dinner.'

By dinner time her mood had undergone so complete a change that Douglas judged it best not to revert to the discussion of painful dilemmas. He was willing to grant any reasonable demand, as well as a good many which might fairly be accounted unreasonable, on his wife's part; but he did not think himself bound to anticipate the latter, and he had a strong impression that she was not serious in all her assertions. It was not surprising that she found life at Stoke Leighton a dull business, now that she would no longer hunt. Well, then, they must take a run abroad, that was all, and see what change of scene would do for her.

He did not at once make his benevolent intention known, because a great political gathering, at which it behoved him to be present, was to take place in the county during the ensuing week, and he was afraid that she would urge him to shirk it; but upon the eve of this important affair he announced that immediately after its conclusion he would be ready to proceed to any southern winter station which she might select, and he was not a little disappointed by her cool reception of the proposal.

'Until the first of February, I suppose?' she said interrogatively.

‘Well, I might pair, of course; but I am not sure that I should be able to manage it. Besides, to tell you the truth, Hélène, I want to be in the House during the early part of the session. If it wouldn’t bore you to listen to a short dissertation upon contemporary politics, I could explain why.’

‘Oh, but I think it would bore me very much,’ answered the Countess, laughing. ‘Almost as much, perhaps, as it would bore you to spend a whole winter in the south. Half a winter won’t do, thank you; one must be born English to admit that half a loaf is better than no bread. Nevertheless, I am sincerely obliged to you for offering me the most that you can, and, as I am not going to accept this favour, I dare say you will be good enough to grant me a smaller one in its place. Will you make my excuses to Lord and Lady Winkfield, and say that I am too unwell to stay with them? I cannot flatter myself that they will miss me, and, if I went, I should only offend them by declining to face a torrent of oratory.’

Lord Winkfield was a great territorial magnate, under whose auspices the political gathering above mentioned was to be held, and Douglas knew very well that offence would be given and taken by the Countess Radna’s refusal at the last moment to join his lordship’s house-party. But, as she remained unmoved by his representations and entreaties, he resigned himself to the snubs which undoubtedly awaited him, and set off to fulfil his engagement without her.

He was duly snubbed by Lady Winkfield on his arrival; but his host, who was a good-humoured old personage, let him off with a mild caution against allowing himself to be hen-pecked, and he spoke so well at the different meetings to which he was conducted that, what with the applause of his audiences and the congratulations of his colleagues, he had almost got the better of his chagrin by the evening of the second day. Having now done all that was required of him to do, he took leave of his entertainers and arranged to make an early start on the morrow. However, he did not start so early but that his letters were delivered to him just as he was leaving for the station; and amongst these was one from his wife, the contents of which filled him with amazement and consternation.

It was dated from London, and stated, in a brief, matter-of-course way, that the writer was about to cross over to Paris, *en route* for the Riviera. ‘Pray excuse this precipitation,’ she

added. 'It is just possible, though I fear it is not very likely, that you may understand how much simpler it is to cut a knot than to exhaust one's patience and hurt one's fingers in a vain attempt to unfasten it. For a day or two, or even a week or two, you will feel angry; but I am quite sure you will not feel lonely while you have your mother and your unmarried sister, and, above all, your Miss Peggy at hand to console you.'

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE DARK.

It is not unlikely that the Countess would have been pleased, and it is certain that she would have been amused, if she could have seen the effect produced upon her husband by the short missive which she had addressed to him. Douglas, while driving to the station, read her letter over half a dozen times without being able to arrive at the faintest comprehension of its meaning. Hélène explained nothing; she assigned no reason for her abrupt departure, nor did she mention for how long a time she proposed to absent herself; he would have supposed that she expected him to follow her had not that hypothesis been excluded by her allusion to his probable wrath and possible loneliness.

At all events, he must follow her without loss of time; that was the first thing that became clear to him through a mist of total bewilderment; and the next was that he must take measures to protect her from the vexatious consequences to which so hasty and ill-advised a step on her part might have laid her open. With this end in view he was careful, when he reached home, to avoid gratifying the evident curiosity of the servants. He merely gave orders for such clothes as he required to be packed up, saying that he was about to join the Countess, who had had to leave for the Continent rather earlier than had been anticipated, and that he would write or telegraph as soon as he should be able to name a date for his return. Then he travelled up to London and, crossing by the night mail, arrived at the Gare du Nord on the following morning.

He was tolerably confident of finding his wife in Paris, for he knew what her customary methods of moving from place to

place were, and that such arrangements as she deemed essential for a long journey cannot be made from one moment to another; but he preferred engaging a room at one of the large hotels to proceeding straight to her house, and it was not until after mid-day that he presented himself in the Avenue Friedland. It struck him as a good omen that he was instantly and deferentially admitted by the urbane functionary whose duty it had been, once upon a time, to turn him away from the door. 'She does expect me, then, after all,' he thought. But he was not quite so well pleased when, on entering the ante-room, he found his further progress barred by the burly form of Dr. Schott, nor did he half like the grin with which his old enemy greeted him.

'I had no idea that you were in Paris, Dr. Schott,' said he. 'May I ask whether you are here by appointment, or only by a—happy accident?'

'I was telegraphed for, and I have come,' replied the Doctor, with something very like a chuckle. 'I am always at the orders of the Countess. But you, dear sir—I think you have not been telegraphed for, eh? No, no! it would be a little too soon for that.'

Douglas presumed that the man intended to be impertinent, and was very nearly telling him so, but restrained himself. 'You must be aware,' he remarked, 'that my wife has left England quite unexpectedly, and without having given me any warning of her departure; therefore you won't be surprised at my having come here as quickly as I could in order to see her. Perhaps you will be so good as to let her know that I have arrived.'

'I am not at all surprised,' the Doctor answered, with the same ill-concealed air of amused satisfaction, 'and the Countess shall certainly be informed that you are desirous of speaking with her. As for her consenting to see you, that is another matter. Indeed, I am by no means sure that I ought not to forbid an interview.'

'To forbid it?'

'In my capacity of the Countess's physician, *bien entendu*; I pretend to no other authority over her, or I should have exerted it long ago. If I did not fear to offend you, Mr. Colborne, I would take the liberty to observe that you and she did not know what you were doing when you agreed in such a hurry to bind yourselves together. By this time you have probably discovered the difference between dreams and realities. The Countess, at least, appears to have made the discovery and to have been a

good deal agitated by it. All that is no business of mine, you say? Well, sir, it is my business—and I am paid for performing it—to watch over my patient's state of health, and I do not hesitate to say that her health will suffer from the reproaches which, I perceive, are at the tip of your tongue. I have prescribed the only remedy which seems to me likely to prove of any service; that is, complete change of surroundings and avoidance of mental disturbance. Consequently, we are to leave for Nice in a day or two. I am not called upon to prescribe for you; but, as a friend, I venture to suggest that you should return home and attend to your affairs. By May or June next circumstances may have become more favourable to your wishes; at present, believe me, you will do no good either to her or to yourself by insisting upon your rights.'

By way of response Douglas rang the bell and told the servant, who promptly appeared, to announce him to the Countess. 'You may say,' he added, 'that I wish to see her immediately.'

Dr. Schott made a deprecating gesture, stuck his hands into his pockets and sauntered towards the window. 'Please to take note,' said he presently, over his shoulder, 'that if you are received, it will be against my advice and without my sanction.'

Douglas did not choose to gratify his tormentor by any rejoinder; and, after what seemed to him an unnecessarily protracted delay, the domestic re-entered the room with a request that he would give himself the trouble to step into the Countess's boudoir.

How well he remembered that exquisitely furnished apartment, with its subdued light, its Gobelins tapestries, and its faint, indescribable perfume. It was into the same room that he had been admitted on that evening when he had first had the audacity to declare his love, and everything connected with the situation seemed quite oddly the same—including his own feelings. He had been tremulous and excited then; he found, somewhat to his vexation, that he was tremulous and excited now. He had been resolved then to learn his fate, once for all; and was not that very like his present errand? And when, after keeping him waiting for a minute or two, his wife made her appearance, arrayed in a tea-gown which exhibited the latest inspiration of the talented artist whom she employed to design such habiliments for her, he felt as if she had, somehow or other, ceased to be *Hélène* and had become once more the Countess Radna of the past. He was conscious of an utterly absurd access of timidity which, no doubt,

caused him to speak a shade more sharply than he would have done if she had looked less cool and unconcerned.

'May I ask what all this means?' he began. 'You will admit that I am entitled to some explanation, and as yet you have given me none.'

'Haven't I?' returned the Countess, ensconcing herself in a comfortable chair; 'I thought I had; but it is true that I wrote in rather a hurry. Indeed, the hurry is the only thing that demands explanation, I suppose, and I should have thought that it would explain itself. Surely a moment of reflection might have spared you the fatigue of this long journey. You know how I detest useless discussions, and you must have known (because I told you) that I had made up my mind to escape from Stoke Leighton. It is all very well to hesitate until one's mind is made up; but when once the feat has been accomplished, the sooner one acts the better. I am sorry if I have scandalised the county; only, as I shall never return there, the question of whether these good people are scandalised or not is scarcely of so much importance to me as it is to you. However, you will be able to calm their minds a little by assuring them that I have run away alone; for Dr. Schott, I presume, doesn't count.'

'Are you speaking seriously when you say that you will never return?' asked Douglas, with a slight quiver in his voice. 'I can hardly believe that you are; because that would imply that you wish to separate yourself from me altogether.'

'Which would, of course, be inconceivable. Well, if you will excuse me, I would rather not enter upon that question just at present. I am tired and worried, and Dr. Schott will have told you that I am ill. Still, I don't mind saying positively and definitely that nothing would induce me to repeat the experiment of residing at Stoke Leighton; one failure of that description is enough for me, and I suppose you won't dispute the indisputable fact that I have failed.'

Douglas did not attempt so hopeless a task; for, indeed, there was no denying that his wife had failed to adapt herself to the conditions of English country life. He only remarked, somewhat grimly, 'Stoke Leighton is my home.'

'It is your home if you choose to make it so; but it cannot be mine. *A la rigueur* I could put up with London, although I strongly suspect that London and you, when you are there, would get on as well as possible without me. Suppose you were to

return home now and try getting on without me? I shall be surprised, as well as flattered, if, after the warm weather sets in again, I receive a pressing invitation to rejoin you.'

'I can't understand what you mean,' said Douglas, despairingly. 'I may be very stupid; but I frankly confess that I am at my wits' end. What have I done that you should speak to me in this way?'

The Countess sighed impatiently. 'What have you done?' she echoed. 'Will you be satisfied if I answer that you have done an excessively stupid thing in rushing after me? No; of course you won't. You are—pray forgive my candour—too *bourgeois* in your ideas to realise the wisdom of letting a wilful woman have her way or to comprehend that nothing is more ordinary than for the wife of a public man to spend the winter abroad, while his duties retain him at home; you must needs treat yourself to the luxury of one of those noisy scandals which are so dear to your countrymen and countrywomen. Very well; since you will have it so, you shall not be defrauded by me of your queer, insular method of enjoying yourself. Let it be agreed and proclaimed, if you choose, that our separation is to be permanent.'

'But, in the name of reason and common sense, why?' exclaimed Douglas, growing a little warm—for, after all, he was not a *bourgeois*, and he did not much relish being called by that name. 'Is it only because you don't like Stoke Leighton that you talk so coolly of abandoning me? That would be too absurd! Come, Hélène, won't you give me your true motives? Upon my word of honour, I am as completely in the dark about them as a man can be.'

'Your word of honour,' observed the Countess, smiling, 'is not much more to the purpose than your invocation of reason and common sense. If you haven't discovered by this time how little reason and common sense have to do with me or my actions, you may well be in the dark! I despair of being able to enlighten you; all I can say is, that you had better go home and allow me to go to Nice. In fact, I shall go to Nice, whether you allow me or not.'

Douglas paced up and down the room three or four times before trusting himself to make any rejoinder. He was aware that he had reached an important crisis in his life; he was aware that, unless he could exert his marital authority now, he would never be able to exert it again; yet he shrank from issuing a

positive order. His wife, who was pecuniarily independent of him, could not be forced to obey his orders, nor could he emphasise them by anything short of an ultimatum which appeared to have no terrors for her. He might, as every unconcerned spectator will perceive, have conquered by throwing himself at her feet and repeating some of those vows of unalterable love to which she had once lent a willing ear; but as he was by no means unconcerned, and as he was very excusably incensed, the notion of stooping to conquer did not enter into his head. So, as soon as he felt cool enough to measure his words deliberately, he said:

‘You force me to the conclusion that you wish to rid yourself altogether of my control. I don’t know, and you refuse to tell me, what has induced you to take a step for which I was utterly unprepared; but for some time past I have not been so blind as to ignore what I suppose you meant to be obvious—that any love you may once have had for me has worn itself out. However much that may hurt me, I don’t personally consider it a sufficient reason for practically annulling our marriage; but your views of marriage are not, I know, the same as mine, and I need scarcely say that I have no wish to insist upon my rights as a husband against your will. At the same time, I think we must do one thing or the other. I can’t see my way to accepting a partial separation.’

‘Then we will call it a total separation, and say no more about it,’ returned the Countess, with a faint flush upon her cheeks, but with an air of undiminished amiability. ‘You express yourself in such admirable, Christian terms, that I am sure you won’t hesitate to throw the whole blame upon such a heathen as me, and you are most heartily welcome to do so. Let it be assumed that the mistake from first to last has been my fault; it isn’t my fault that civilised nations are not civilised enough to wipe out mistakes of that kind by means of a divorce. However, I can at least promise to give you no trouble for the future, and I won’t detain you any longer for the present. As you have heard from Dr. Schott, I am not very well to-day; so, if you want to make formal conditions and provisos, and to have them set down in writing—as you probably do—perhaps you wouldn’t mind calling again to-morrow.’

She was out of the room before Douglas had time to reply; but in truth he would have made no reply beyond a curt acquiescence to her, had she seen fit to wait for one. His pain and bewilderment were thrown into the background by his just indig-

nation; and as he tramped back towards the hotel in which he was lodging, with his chin in the air and a steady frown upon his brow, the very last thing that he dreamt of was that his wife was at that same moment crying her eyes out in her bedroom because—to borrow the amazingly inappropriate phrase which she used in her self-communings—he had ‘deserted’ her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MARCHESE DI LEONFORTE.

THERE are, as every naval and military commander knows, victories which are barely distinguishable from defeats, except in so far as that they confer prestige upon those who have achieved them. Prestige, it cannot be denied, is a substantial gain, if regarded as a means towards an end; but when the end has been reached, and when there is nothing more to fight for, its value is apt to sink almost to the vanishing point. Now, the Countess Radna, who would doubtless have experienced the bitter pangs of humiliation had she been routed by her husband, instead of having routed him, was not the woman to exult in a triumph for the mere triumph’s sake; so that when Douglas had departed from her without the honours of war, she neither crowed over him nor felt the slightest inclination to crow.

‘I could not have treated him otherwise,’ she said half-apologetically to the Baroness; ‘what has happened now must have happened eventually; he chose to be utterly impracticable, and he has only himself to thank. Nevertheless, it is a pity; for he is an honest man.’

‘It is indeed a pity!’ sighed Bickenbach; ‘it is a thousand pities!’

But Dr. Schott, with one of those guttural laughs which can only issue from the lips of a German, and a fat German, remarked: ‘Let us not exaggerate. A thousand is too many; one is enough, and that is not such a very great one. Admitting that this poor Mr. Colborne was honest, we must still recognise the fact that something more than honesty was required of him, and that he had nothing more to offer. For my own part, I have no hesitation in offering my most heartfelt congratulations to the gracious Countess.’

The gracious Countess did not receive this tribute graciously. 'My good Doctor,' said she, 'I have the highest opinion of your medical skill, and I have no complaint to make of the manner in which you discharged the commission that I entrusted to you this afternoon; but as for your congratulations, you would do better to reserve them until you understand to some extent what you are talking about—which is another way of saying that you had better reserve them eternally. Be satisfied with congratulating yourself. You always hated my husband, you always disliked being put upon half-pay; now, without any effort of your own, you have got rid of the person whom you hated and the thing that you disliked. I don't forbid you to dance and sing, only I must request that you will draw a decent veil over your glee while I am present, because I don't see anything pretty in such exhibitions.'

It was not often that she spoke insolently to her dependents; but when she did so they usually slunk away from her sight in silence, knowing full well that she was in a dangerous mood and that a retort might easily provoke their instant dismissal. Dr. Schott, who was rather in the habit of bullying his august patient, did not venture to bully her now, but left the room without another word. Later in the evening, however, he indemnified himself for his previous self-control by remarking sardonically to Bickenbach:

'What a funny farce we have been playing amongst us! The Countess flatters herself that she knows how to conceal her feelings; but if that Englishman had not been as dense as Englishmen always are, he would have discovered that she has not overcome her infatuation yet. She was ready to scratch my eyes out because I congratulated her upon a success which she has already begun to regret. Yet she will never forgive him; for she is too proud to take the first step, and he is too stupid. And if, by an impossibility, they were reconciled, they would quarrel again within a month.' What a farce, my dear Baroness! What a farce!'

'It may turn to a tragedy,' observed the good Bickenbach gravely and sadly.

'That is possible, although the tragedy will not be of the kind that you contemplate. Shall I let you into a little medical secret? Nobody ever dies of disappointed love; but many people, who have not strong constitutions, worry and excite themselves until the disease which is always waiting for them sees

its opportunity and carries them off. The Countess has a weak constitution; she is going to worry herself; she is going to do all that she can to excite herself; and that is why she has done well to provide herself with a physician. You will see that I shall earn my wages before the winter is over.'

This anticipatory diagnosis was not wanting in shrewdness; but the Doctor was mistaken in supposing that the Countess had already begun to regret her success. She was not jubilant, but she was really relieved to be once more her own mistress; she was really convinced that (as she had said to Bickenbach) what had happened must have happened eventually, and she was almost convinced that she had not a spark of love left for her husband. On the foregoing evening she had felt rather differently; but the readiness with which he had submitted to her conditions, and the absence of anything approaching passion in his perfunctory protests, had put the finishing touch to a mental portrait of him upon which she had been engaged for some time past. He was, no doubt, an honest, well-meaning man; but neither in his affections nor in his purposes was there that strength which she had mistakenly ascribed to him when she had fancied that she could bow to his rule. There was nothing for it, as matters had fallen out, but to close that chapter and to begin a fresh one.

In the course of the Countess Radna's life there had been many chapters. None of them had been quite so serious as the last; still some had looked serious enough *dans le temps*, while all had been relegated without much trouble to that softened background of memory whither she now proposed to despatch Douglas Colborne. The difficulty, of course, was to find some fresh interest in life, and, as she journeyed south, she frankly acknowledged to herself that the hiring of a villa at Nice was not a particularly promising or original start to have made. Nevertheless, there are possibilities connected with almost every situation—unless, indeed, that of the châtelaine of an English country house be counted as a possible situation—so that when she took possession of her new quarters, she was not only exhilarated by the warmth, the sunshine and the luxuriant vegetation of a climate more highly favoured than that of the British Isles, but was persuaded that she would contrive to get some enjoyment, or pseudo-enjoyment, out of the materials which lay ready to her hand.

The materials, it was true, were not novel, consisting, as they did, in that species of cosmopolitan society with which experience

had rendered her only too familiar; yet, although these people might be generically wearisome, there was a chance of their proving less so in isolated cases, and the Countess, following half-unconsciously the bent of her temperament, set to work without loss of time to seek for isolated cases. It is needless to say that her house was besieged from the very first moment that she entered it. She had an immense acquaintance; wherever she went, she was tolerably sure of meeting a host of people whom she knew. Her arrival at Nice was at once bruited abroad, and it also became known in a surprisingly short space of time that the husband whom she had chosen had not proved sufficiently cosmopolitan in his ways to suit her. However, the gilded youths, Parisian and other, who hastened to leave their cards at her door made a very great mistake in leaping to the conclusion which they deemed appropriate to the circumstances. It was not their waxed moustaches, their carefully trimmed and pointed beards, their varnished boots, or their mincing manners that were likely to find favour in her eyes, nor did she treat them with any more ceremony than she had been wont to bestow upon them in days gone by. She entertained them, as well as the ladies who were to all intents and purposes their counterparts; she spent her money freely, as of yore, and she soon became the leading personage in a *coterie* which had a right to call itself aristocratic; but amongst the throng of admirers, rivals, friends and enemies which speedily gathered round her she looked in vain for a single individual whose friendship appeared to show any promise of repaying cultivation. The best part of the winter passed away without having brought her what she wanted—which, to be sure, was the less surprising because she had no definite idea of what it was that she did want.

Bickenbach got into sad disgrace by timidly suggesting, one fine morning, that her patroness might be joining for news from England. The Countess, who for some little time had been ailing and depressed, turned upon her instantly with a request that, if she could not help being a perfect imbecile, she would at least refrain from talking like one.

‘Do you suppose,’ she asked, ‘that if I felt the slightest curiosity to learn how Mr. Colborne is amusing himself, I couldn’t gratify it? As it happens, I have received, and continue to receive, numerous—far too numerous—letters from his mother. Judging by what she tells me, and by what I have noticed in the

English newspapers, I should say that he was amusing himself very well indeed. Much better than I am, *par exemple!*'

The Baroness shed a few of the tears which were always at her command, and apologised humbly for her indiscretion. 'It was only because I can see that you are not happy, dear Countess Hélène,' she explained.

'My good Bickenbach, can you, with your hand upon your heart, say that you have ever seen me happy since the age of fourteen? And even then you used to do your best to destroy my happiness by giving me a holiday as often as I chose to ask for it. You would excuse my being peevish occasionally if you would consider how hard my case is. All my life I have suffered from the incurable complaint of obtaining everything that I have wished for. If there were something that I couldn't afford to buy, or if there were somebody who would kindly refuse to be introduced to me, I daresay I might recover my spirits.'

The Baroness knew, but was afraid to say, that there are many things which cannot be purchased; what she did not know, and would never have guessed, was that at that same moment there was actually an individual in Nice who had made up his mind that he would decline to be presented to the Countess Radna. The Countess was, at the time, equally ignorant of the existence of so strange a being; but she was made aware of it no later than on the morrow in a fashion which both interested and diverted her. Until then she had scarcely noticed, and had only bestowed a passing thought or two upon the Marchese di Leonforte, a tall, handsome, olive-complexioned Sicilian nobleman whom she had met perhaps a dozen times in public and in private. Once or twice at the theatre she had found his great black eyes fixed upon her, and, after she had returned his gaze for a second, he had continued to stare at her with that melancholy persistency which, for some reason or other, does not seem to partake of rudeness when practised by Italians. She had divined that he was a little smitten with her, but had been in no way moved by a discovery to which she was thoroughly accustomed, nor had it occurred to her to request an introduction which there was no reason to doubt that he could obtain if he desired it.

Chancing, however, upon this occasion to encounter him at a large afternoon reception given by a Russian princess, and observing that he had, as usual, begun to contemplate her from afar, she bethought her that it might possibly be amusing to ask him what

he meant by it. Accordingly she turned to one of the little Parisian dandies who had stationed themselves by her side, and said :

‘You know the Marchese di Leonforte, do you not ? Bring him to me. I should like to make his acquaintance and condole with him, for he looks almost as bored as I feel.’

The little dandy flew to do her bidding, but returned presently with an embarrassed air and a somewhat incoherent apology. The Marchese, it appeared, had felt profoundly honoured, but had respectfully begged to be excused. He was not going much into society ; he did not propose to remain long at Nice ; he would not have shown himself at the present gathering but for the circumstance that the Princess was an old friend ; in a word, no pretexts could have been more lame, and the Countess’s perturbed envoy did not better them much by adding :

‘Leonforte is an original—one might almost say a savage. *Bon garçon, au fond, beau joueur*, and a horseman of the most intrepid, but absolutely without *tenue*. It has to be remembered that he is an Italian—a Sicilian even. He is not like the rest of the world.’

‘He has just given convincing proof of that,’ remarked the Countess, laughing, and not at all offended. ‘Nevertheless, I am sure he cannot have meant to insult me ; so please go back and tell him that I insist.’

The result of this second mission—which, indeed, could hardly have resulted in a second failure—was that a gentleman, who, however devoid he might be of *tenue* in the Parisian sense of that term, did not at least seem to be easily put out of countenance, was led up to the Countess, and, after making his bow, offered a grave apology for the breach of good manners of which he had been guilty.

‘I could not flatter myself, madame,’ said he, ‘that you would waste another thought upon one so insignificant as myself ; I did not reflect for the moment that I was bound to treat your gracious intimation as a command. Is it permitted to me to hope that you will add to your kindness and condescension by pardoning my *gaucherie* ?’

He spoke deliberately, in a low-pitched voice, and his French was fairly good, though it was evident that he was not quite at home in that language. The Countess, who answered him with a good deal less of formality than he had displayed, was unable to

break through the barriers of his distant, deferential politeness ; nor could she help feeling a little snubbed by his obvious anxiety to retire as soon as she should have satisfied her curiosity. It was so novel a sensation to her to be snubbed by anybody that, after she had sustained an interchange of meaningless observations for five minutes or so, she moved away from the pricked-up ears of her satellites towards an inner room, making a sign, as she did so, to the Italian which he could not disobey. As soon as they were practically alone, she said, in reply to a question which he had not put :

‘Oh, no ; it is not because you are the handsomest man here, nor even because you wear a sorrowful and mysterious aspect ; pray don’t allow any ideas of that sort to enter into your mind. But you will allow that it is natural on my part to wonder why you were so unwilling to be presented to me.’

He answered, with perfect composure, ‘Madame, it would be impossible to tell you.’

‘Why would it be impossible ?’

‘Because, when I speak frankly, I have the habit of using a frankness which would be incomprehensible and probably offensive to you. If the kindness which you have already shown me might embolden me to ask a favour of you, it would be that you should permit me to withdraw again into the obscurity out of which you have deigned to summon me for a moment.’

‘And I who was about to request that you would honour my poor garden-party to-morrow by attending it ! Come, Monsieur le Marquis, you are neither as humble nor as obscure as you choose to pretend, and I suspect that you would be rather disappointed if I were to take you at your word. On my side, I admit that I should be inconsolable if I were to lose sight of you before you had explained yourself. Shall we postpone the confession until we are a little better acquainted ? That will give you time to satisfy yourself that I like frankness, that I am not abnormally dull of comprehension and that I am not easily offended.’

The mysterious Italian hesitated and, for a minute or so, gazed frowningly at the carpet. His rejoinder, when at length it came, was somewhat startling and unconventional. ‘Madame, I will take the liberty to give you at once a specimen of my frankness. Histories have been related to me about you which I do not like ; it is said that you have a husband in England, and that you have separated yourself from him without any of the reasons

which are commonly considered sufficient. Can you figure to yourself that I am primitive enough to be repelled by such levity? and can you bear to listen to such an avowal without taking offence?’

The Countess coloured slightly. The avowal was certainly very unlike that which she had anticipated, and she was, in truth, offended by it; but she felt that it would be too humiliating to acknowledge herself offended by a rebuke which she had invited, so she returned, with a smile:

‘You make it absolutely essential for me to be better acquainted with you. Since you are so primitive, you cannot deny the right of the accused to be heard in her own defence, because that is one of the first principles of primitive justice, and I dare say you will also allow that this is neither the time nor the place for prolonged explanations. By saying what you have said, you have at least committed yourself to appearing at my tedious entertainment to-morrow.’

The Marchese responded by a solemn bow and took advantage of the entrance of his hostess, who wished to present some stranger or other to the Countess Radna, to effect his retreat.

The Countess was thus left in some uncertainty as to whether he intended to obey her behest or not; but on the following afternoon he duly appeared amongst her other guests, and very glad she was to catch sight of his sombre countenance; for, as may be imagined, the remarks which he had permitted himself to make had given her something to think about.

‘Tell me,’ said she, when she had drawn him away to a comparatively secluded part of the shady garden which she temporarily owned, ‘are you a religious fanatic?’

He replied in his slow, measured accents: ‘Madame, I am a Catholic, like my ancestors. I dare not affirm that I am a good Catholic, if that is what you understand by a fanatic.’

‘Oh, it is quite practicable to remain a good Catholic and to indulge discreetly in *menus plaisirs*—such as gambling, for example. That is well known. What I mean is, are you fanatical enough to regard a contract of marriage as a sacrament, and those who violate it as monsters of iniquity? If so, I am a monster; and it only remains for me to apologise for my audacity in having ventured to thrust my acquaintance upon a saint.’

The Marchese di Leonforte was not precisely a saint, but he really was something of a fanatic, and he could not look upon

marriage as a mere civil contract which might be repudiated at will. After a few seconds of uneasy silence he said :

‘Madame la Comtesse, I have neither the pretension nor the presumption to judge you.’

‘Oh, but I thought that the privilege of judging me was just what you claimed. At all events you gave your judgment and condemnation of me yesterday as reasons for your reluctance to have anything to do with me.’

‘I spoke too hastily, and I should have done better to keep silence. All sorts of lies are repeated and circulated ; it may not be through any fault of yours that you are living apart from your husband—what do I know ? The truth is that I had other reasons which it would be out of the question for me to intrude upon your notice.’

‘A simple antipathy, then ?’

‘If it pleases you to call it by that name. In any case, I must respectfully decline to join the band of young men who run errands for you and kiss your hands, and boast behind your back of favours which have assuredly not been conferred upon them. I am not made of that material.’

‘Would you not have done well,’ asked the Countess, blandly, ‘to wait for an invitation before spurning it ? I am obliged to you, however, for your charming candour, and the least that I can do in return is to grant you an immediate and unconditional release.’

With that she turned and left him. Of course, his meaning was no longer a mystery to her ; of course she understood that he had fallen in love with her ; and, since he chose to be so serious and tragic over it, no doubt the best way of treating him was to send him about his business. All the same, she would have liked to convince him that she was not what he took her for ; because, although it is not disagreeable to be loved, it is decidedly disagreeable to be despised.

(To be continued.)

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